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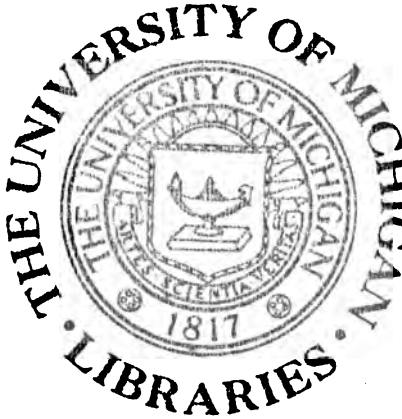
THE VICE OF FOOLS

by

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR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The Vice of Fools

by

H. C. Chatfield-Taylor

Illustrations by

Raymond M. Crosby

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1897

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"OF ALL THE CAUSES WHICH CONSPIRE TO BLIND
MAN'S ERRING JUDGMENT, AND MISGUIDE THE MIND,
WHAT THE WEAK HEAD WITH STRONGEST BIAS RULES,
IS PRIDE, THE NEVER-FAILING VICE OF FOOLS."

—*Pope.*

The Vice of Fools

I

"SET FORTH IN POMP SHE CAME."
Richard II. v. 1.

Official Washington was huddled in the drawing-rooms of the Secretary of War. All sorts and conditions of bureaucracy were there. Lean, litigious congressmen with shaggy locks or corpulent and pompous senators with radiant bald spots, touched shoulders with cabinet officers and their clerks, while scornful diplomats with glittering baubles dangling from their coat lapels mingled with officers in blue and gold and everywhere were the rustling gowns of pretentious wives and pretty daughters.

These people smirked and nodded, prattled and jostled with the gratifying consciousness that they were fulfilling the function for which the chance of party supremacy had chosen them. There is a

complacency in office-holding which is perhaps reward sufficient for the labors of government, even with the dread spectre of oblivion hovering near.

Secretary Duncan and his daughter stood together receiving. A constant stream of people poured down the stairs from the floor above and perfunctorily shook hands. The presentations were being made by a tall young cavalry officer, sturdy and erect, but more at home in the saddle than the drawing-room.

"What a severe expression that soldier has," said de Komlossy, the Hungarian Minister, to Mrs. Cortland, who was sitting with him on a divan, watching the incoming crowd.

Mrs. Cortland, a New Yorker by birth, a cosmopolite by experience, was a widow of forty who had chosen Washington as her winter home with the expressed intention of being amused. Wealthy and childless, she viewed the world from the composite standpoint of a beautiful woman and an experienced man. She was born with the tactful genius of a controlling spirit in politics, but being a woman she contented her-

self with controlling politicians. In figure she was a girl, and in spite of ten years of widowhood and twenty of social vicissitude, she looked not a day over thirty. It is true that her enemies insisted dark tints were discernible about the roots of her golden hair, but this unkindness was caused by jealousy of her superiority—a superiority attributable not, as in the case of many women, merely to artifice but to a rare intelligence and a natural simplicity and modesty inseparable from good breeding.

"Yes," Mrs. Cortland replied to the minister's remark, raising her lorgnon with an interested gesture; "Jack Hardy would like to handle that crowd like a detachment of recruits or a herd of broncos."

"That fellow ought to be a cowboy," said Komlossy. "I do n't like your soldiers; they are too brusque and always awkward in a drawing-room."

"Possibly they were intended for some other service," said Mrs. Cortland dryly.

The Hungarian glanced at her with his keen little eyes. There was a slight sneer on his lip, partially concealed by the stubby white hairs of his mustache.

"You are unlike most American society women," he said; "You do not apologize for your country's faults."

"No, I applaud its virtues."

"In that you are original."

"Is it original to be patriotic; is it original to have a principle?"

"Ah, madam, with you patriotism is not a principle. I fear it is merely a pastime, or—dare I say it?—a pose."

"Most women would resent that."

"But, my dear Mrs. Cortland," the little diplomat said fulsomely; "you are not most women; you are unique—a monopoly of charm with a modicum of fault."

"I hate compliments, Komlossy. They are merely intended to delude fools. The wise they nauseate."

"But, madame, when a compliment conveys the truth—"

"Then it is no longer a compliment."

"You are too cynical to be a woman—too clever to be a man."

Mrs. Cortland glanced at her well-turned shoulders.

"Let us talk about something serious," she said abruptly.

"Eh bien. Let us talk about Secretary Duncan's pretty daughter and that Jack Hardy whom I do not like."

She raised her eyes and took one quick glance at the tall girl who stood beside her father greeting the incoming guests.

What a beautiful creature, she thought. Women's eyes reveal their hearts, the lips their habits. That girl longs for love and gets admiration. She is almost too clever.

Mrs. Cortland cast a side glance at the young soldier who stood beside Violet Duncan. Too straightforward and stiff to win a girl like Violet, she thought. That would need a tactician more skilled than herself.

"No, I do n't think that is serious," she said to her companion.

"The soldier at least is serious," replied the diplomat.

"Successful soldiers usually are."

"But I mean he is in love *de pied en cap*. He growls like a mastiff when a man speaks to her."

"I do n't believe he has even told her that he loves her."

"Nonsense."

"Men like Hardy love silently for years, because they are too proud to speak."

"Or too priggish."

"Why do you dislike him so?"

"Because he has no manners."

"He has morals, which are much rarer now-a-days."

"Morals are the stock in trade of prigs."

"You must not abuse him so. At any rate he is a brave man."

"Yes, your congress has given him that bronze medal; another case of politics I presume."

"He left his command to rescue a wounded sergeant in the face of a thousand hostiles," said Mrs. Cortland resentfully. "Is not that bravery?"

The Hungarian laughed with a sinister little cackle.

"Well, granting he is brave, I maintain he is rude and that he is head over heels in love with that girl. Will she marry him?"

"No."

"She wants a grand duke?"

"No, she wants nothing more than love."

"Is she so bourgeoise as that?"

"She is a superior girl."

Komlossy shrugged his shoulders.

"Superior to her father, yes. She is the man of the family. She has more tact and cleverness than half the cabinet, but when you tell me she has a heart, I do n't believe it."

"All women have hearts, a few have intellects."

"Bah, a woman's heart is like one of those toy balloons children play with, it is lighter than air and most restless when tied to somebody. You think you have it when, psht, away it goes. The only way to make an impression is to break it."

"Why are you so spiteful, Komlossy?"

"Because for the moment I am contented. Charity is bred in misery."

Mrs. Cortland did not reply. She raised her eyeglass and gazed about the room.

"Tell me," she said; "you know everybody. Who is that handsome, well-groomed man who has just come in? He looks like an Englishman."

Komlossy smiled.

"Do n't you know him? Why, that is

Ritchie Maitland, one of your country's most distinguished diplomats, late Secretary of Embassy in Paris, but at present, owing to the fall of the political axe, unattached and looking for a job."

"Oh, yes, I know all about him. They say he made himself very unpopular with Americans visiting Europe."

"Because he refused to introduce some long-bearded senators and their wives to the sacred precincts of the Faubourg St. Germain, where his own position was none too sure."

"I should like to meet him. I wish you would introduce him."

"Madame, your wishes are commands," said the minister rising from his seat. He was a thin little man, with a parchment-like skin and glossy white hair, who walked with a distinguished step. He had been in Washington for several years and spoke English almost without an accent. Unlike many of his colleagues he understood the various shades of American political and social life.

Seeing the minister vacate his seat, a man who was standing near by approached.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Cortland," he said.

"Ah, good-evening, General Lloyd," she answered, raising her eyes to the newcomer, a man of about sixty, tall, suave, and rather stout, with a sleek, well-bred look, but with cruel eyes and sensuous lips. In his button-hole was the rosette of the Loyal Legion; his clothes were scrupulously fashionable, and he spoke with a soft, well-modulated voice.

"I saw you talking to Komlossy," he said as he took the seat beside Mrs. Cortland. "Did his bombast frighten you?"

"Komlossy never frightens me. He is nothing but a tom-tom. He makes a great deal of noise and people think he is very terrible, but in reality he is merely dried-up skin over emptiness."

General Lloyd smiled.

"You are belying your reputation, you actually made an unkind remark about a man behind his back. I dare you to repeat it to his face."

"I accept the challenge. I would say anything to Komlossy."

"Well, here he comes."

The little Hungarian, followed by the ex-secretary of embassy, made his way through the crowd.

"Mrs. Cortland, may I introduce Mr. Maitland?" he said when he reached her side. "And General Lloyd, Mr. Maitland."

"I am delighted to meet you," said Mrs. Cortland. "I have heard of you so often. Won't you sit down? There is room for one more on this divan. As for you, Komlossy, I have talked to you enough this evening."

"'One moment, Komlossy," said General Lloyd. "Mrs. Cortland has something to say to you, something very disagreeable."

"Then I will not listen; I do not believe Mrs. Cortland would say anything disagreeable, and if she did, I should not care to hear it. Good-bye. I am going to talk to the wives of my colleagues."

The Hungarian walked away abruptly, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"What a grand thing a reputation is, Mrs. Cortland," said General Lloyd.

"Komlossy would not believe you called him a tom-tom, even if you acknowledged it."

"He was the tom-tom who was sounding your praises, Mr. Maitland," she said abruptly, scanning the man who had just taken the seat beside her.

She did not like his face. His little brown eyes set close together were cold and selfish, and she thought his lips too straight and thin; but he was tall and distinguished, and wore his clothes well. He was decidedly good-looking and his manner was a strange mixture of self-confidence and obsequiousness.

"You have just come to Washington, I believe," she said by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes. I used to live here years ago. I was four years in the State Department before I went to France."

"Oh, then you know us thoroughly."

"One can never know Washington. It is a kaleidoscope which shifts with every change of politics."

"But surely you know many people?" interrupted General Lloyd.

"No, only a few, mostly those whom I have met in Paris."

"Well, everybody who is anybody is out to-night," continued General Lloyd.

"Yes, Violet Duncan is a remarkable girl," replied Mrs. Cortland. "She is the success of this administration."

"Has not her father great influence with the President?" asked Maitland.

"Yes, almost as much as General Lloyd."

"How absurd," said the General. "The President and I are old friends, but I have no influence with him."

"If I wished an appointment I should beg for your support. If you refused I should know that I had failed."

Mrs. Cortland saw the look of intense interest in Maitland's eye. She smiled.

"You evidently want something, Mrs. Cortland," laughed the General, rising from his seat. "I am going before you compel me to commit myself."

"Do not think you can escape me so easily. I shall haunt your hotel until I have your endorsement."

"With that delightful prospect you will never obtain it. The pleasure of seeing

you continuously would be too great to lose."

"But, General, you do not know the will of a persistent woman."

"You forget that I have been in politics for thirty years," he said as he walked away.

Maitland's glance followed his retreating form.

"Is he really so influential with the administration?" he asked.

"He thinks he is," she replied dryly

"Then you were merely flattering him."

"Not exactly. He has plenty of influence in New York, and lots of money. He practically controls the delegation of his state, and is a power, if a cunning, cold, selfish, unprincipled man can be a power."

"It is evident you do not like him."

"No, he is one of the few men whom I despise."

"You are very severe."

"No, I am very just. General Lloyd killed his wife by coldness and neglect. He was overbearing, exacting and, cruel. He treated her like an inferior. He neglected her, too, but I assure you he never neglects the wives of his friends."

"But he is at least a man of the world," said Maitland.

"Yes, his manners are irreproachable and his morals irredeemable."

Maitland smiled. "Morality has sexual variations," he said. "In a woman it is honor, in a man honesty."

"Not exactly," she replied. "Honesty is a term you men apply to your transactions with each other. Your treatment of women is so universally dishonorable that you do not consider it even worthy of opprobrium."

"Really, Mrs. Cortland," he said, laughing, "Your denunciation of my sex is so absolute that a refutation appears useless. I confess, however, that misanthropy was the last sentiment I expected to find concealed beneath such a face as yours."

"A woman's face is invariably a mask for her fancy. Like a court masker she can only be recognized by her mouth."

"What a novel theory!" said Maitland in an interested tone. "It might be possible to tell a woman's age by her teeth I suppose, but to tell her character by her lips—that seems quite another thing."

"But I am confident that a woman's mouth is a true index to her motives."

"You must demonstrate your theory. Now, Miss Duncan for instance. What does her mouth indicate?"

Mrs. Cortland scrutinized the beautiful face of the secretary's daughter. "At present her lips lack tenderness," she said; "They are too firmly set. Love has not closed her heart to ambition."

"But is she not cold by nature?"

"No, she is cold because she has not met the man she can love."

"Who must possess the melting power of a blast furnace I should say," replied Maitland doubtfully.

"No, I think that at heart Violet Duncan is sincere."

"Sincere in everything but love."

"It is that which proves a woman's sincerity," replied Mrs. Cortland firmly. "A sincere woman loves, a fickle woman loves to love, and a selfish woman loves to be loved."

"What an uncanny person you are. I hope you cannot read men so clearly."

"All men are more or less alike. The

II

"FRIENDSHIP 'S FULL OF DREGS."
Timon of Athens, I. 2.

As the last carriage rolled away from the secretary's house Violet Duncan dropped wearily into the corner of a divan. Her white shoulders sank into the soft cushions. Jack Hardy, erect and military, stood beside her, his powerful figure splendidly set off by the blue and yellow uniform of the cavalry arm. After the brilliance and bustle of the official reception the drawing-room seemed deserted and still. The secretary had gone to the library to write.

Violet partly closed her eyes. The soldier watched her intently. He had a frank, manly face with clear blue eyes and high cheek bones. Under his sandy mustache, almost white in contrast with the florid cheeks, was a straight, determined mouth.

Violet half opened her eyes, and meeting his glance, smiled in a listless way.

"Sit down, Jack, won't you," she said.

"VIOLET DUNCAN DROPPED WEARILY INTO THE CORNER OF A DIVAN."

"I was waiting to say good-night."

"Do n't go yet."

"But you look tired."

"I never go to bed before Pater. He might want something, you know," she answered, suppressing a yawn with her fingers. "Sit down and amuse me."

Hardy unclasped his sword, laid it across a chair and took the seat beside her.

"Why were you looking at me so curiously?" she asked. "What were you thinking about? Tell me."

"I was thinking that I would rather be a beautiful girl of twenty-three than anything in the world."

"At twenty-five you would wish you were a man again."

"But to be absolutely admired as you were to-night,—that must be happiness. To have that for even a year. What more could one ask?"

"Contentment, Jack. There is no contentment in this life; it only hinders one from finding it elsewhere."

"But one can 't live without adulation. The more we despise it the more necessary it becomes."

"That is a strange sentiment for you, Jack."

"I know it," he said with a sigh.

"Then why do you try to be cynical?"

"I was trying to understand you, Violet. You have changed so much during the past few years."

"Yes, I can scarcely understand myself. Do you remember those days in Springfield, when Pater was governor of the state, and you were detailed to inspect the militia?"

"Yes, you were only sixteen then."

"And how terribly provincial we were. It gives me the horrors to think of us then. Why, we dined at one o'clock and had tea with jam and pickles and all kinds of horrible concoctions."

Hardy smiled. "And do French entrées make you any happier?"

"Yes. I honestly think I get as much pleasure from the knowledge that we have a good cook as I do from any one thing. I can 't conceive of anything more mortifying than the giving of bad dinners."

"Do you want me to think you are hopelessly frivolous?"

"Do you know, Jack," she said looking

into his face; "I love to say things to shock you. I have a feeling that you do n't approve of me any more, and I take a certain malicious joy in making you think I am worse than I really am."

"I sometimes like to think of you as you were," he replied. "Not that I disapprove of you now, but I do n't quite understand you. You seem completely absorbed with the life here and to me it is so artificial and unsatisfactory. The game is n't worth the candle."

"But you do n't understand the game, Jack. The feverish excitement of it. It is fascinating. There is nothing like it,—play, continuous play, night and day, manœuvring, scheming, checkmating. The stakes are success. To win one must be always in the game; to drop out for a moment means ruin. All other games are insipid."

For a moment Hardy was silent.

"I suppose the frontier is the place for me," he said, finally.

"Jack, do you know what you need?"

"A good shaking?"

"No, marching orders. You ought to be sent back to the frontier, to some one-

company post. After you had lived in an adobe hut for a few years, with nobody to talk to but greasers and Indians, you would begin to think you had made a mistake in despising society. I have a mind to persuade Pater to send you."

Hardy laughed. "Perhaps you are right, but am I any more inconsistent than you? A moment ago you said that all society did was to prevent you from finding contentment elsewhere."

"But who is contented? We all have our ideals of happiness. The realization never comes. Pleasure is not a bad substitute."

"You do n't believe your own pessimism," he said firmly. "It has a hollow ring."

"Why say that?"

"Because I believe in you."

"Your faith is stronger than mine," she said with a sigh. "I have no confidence in myself. I often wonder what will become of me. We have two years more in office, but what then? I could not go back to Illinois."

"There is always the possibility of marriage."

"No," she said, shaking her head doubtfully; "I cannot think of myself as a married woman,—not for a long time at least."

"But to follow out your doctrines, marriage would be the next logical move. At least with a rich man."

"No, Jack, I do n't think I could marry a man I did not love."

He smiled. "You see I am making you prove the falseness of your faith."

"But I could not marry a poor man even if I loved him."

"You say that because you have never been in love."

"I was almost in love with you once, before we became such thorough friends."

"Yes, time strengthens friendship."

"And weakens love," she laughed. "Love is born suddenly, friendship grows by degrees."

"But cannot love grow slowly also?" he asked, looking into her face, anxiously.

"That is too much like friendship to be love. Love comes without deliberation."

He left his seat and paced the floor slowly. "I wonder what the man you will love is like," he said. "It will be

hard for me to have this—this friendship of ours end."

She laughed. "Do n't worry, Jack. The beginning of the end is not yet."

"But what you call love comes suddenly."

"Yes, unless I could feel the violence of love I should not know I was in love."

"The violence of love is its bitterness."

"Jack, you talk strangely to-night," she said. "What is the matter? There must be something, you have been so moody lately."

He laughed cynically. "Yes, there is something," he said.

"Then tell me."

"You are the last person in the world to whom I would tell it."

She met his glance, then turned her eyes away.

He paced the floor deliberately.

"Good-night," he said abruptly; "I am going."

Without speaking, he took his sword from the chair and walked into the hall. Violet followed and stood in the door.

"Jack," she said as he threw his military

cloak about his shoulders, "friendship is rarer than love, and more satisfactory."

"And does one exclude the other?"

"Yes, love begins with love."

Hardy took her hand and held it. "Good-night, Violet; good-night," was all he said. She felt the tremor of his hand.

He opened the great hall door, a cold blast chilled Violet's shoulders. The door closed with a jar, his sword clicked on the stone steps, then all was silent.

For a time she stood with her hands tightly clasped together. Then tears glistened in her eyes. She buried her face in her hands and wept. "I wish I could love him," she cried; "I wish I could."

III

"AT THE LATTER END OF A DINNER."
All's Well that ends Well, II. 5.

Mrs. Cortland's Sunday dinners were never dull.

They were always small, never too long, and the guests were chosen with unerring tact. She abhorred functions, so the few officials who came on these occasions were invited as friends, not as functionaries. Mrs. Cortland was a leader of the exclusive set which boasted that but six senators and three congressmen were admitted within its folds. The number of cabinet ministers was proportionately large, but the administration was popular socially, as some of the so-called "cabinet ladies" entertained delightfully. None, however, was more popular than Violet Duncan. She was universally acknowledged to be the success of the administration. Violet had a standing dinner engagement with Mrs. Cortland for each alternate Sunday until

Lent. This was irrefutable testimony of her popularity.

As Violet entered Mrs. Cortland's drawing-room the Sunday following her own reception she cast a hurried glance about the room. Weazen Komlossy was almost eclipsed on a distant divan by two matrons of bulging proportions. He always made it a point to talk to the women who entertain, before dinner, so that after dinner he might devote himself to the women who amuse.

Mrs. Jack Elliott, a very pretty, very frivolous woman of twenty-five, was surrounded by a group of young secretaries and attachés, who laughed at her flighty remarks and paid her the extravagant compliments she courted. In a darkened corner Dick Willing, a good-looking, impecunious clerk in the State Department whom every girl liked, but none wanted to marry, was looking into the eyes of a young heiress to millions. This called forth sinister glances from the dark face of Count Joam de Albuquerque, the Portuguese secretary, whose monthly custom was to lay his title at the feet of this girl, with pro-

testations of affection on his lips and predilections for the millions in his heart.

The hostess was talking to Ritchie Maitland. She had met him again at dinner the night before and had invited him verbally. A new man was always an addition. There were sixteen people in all, and Violet was the last to arrive.

"I fear I am horribly late," she said, as she extended her hand to Mrs. Cortland; "I have n't a rational excuse either."

"Never mind, dear; punctuality is the thief of time. What a lovely gown you have, but you make any gown look lovely. Of course you know Mr. Maitland," she added, turning to her companion; "he sits next you at dinner, but I warn you not to believe a word he says. These diplomats, you know."

"Diplomacy, I believe, is the art of dissembling graciously," said Violet, addressing Maitland.

"Having left the service I shall not attempt to dissemble my admiration, Miss Duncan."

"Nor I my anxiety. I have heard that you are atrociously critical. Is it not true.

Mrs. Cortland?" she asked, turning to the hostess.

"Mr. Maitland discriminates before disparaging, so you have nothing to fear, my dear."

"Dinner is served, madam," said a sleek, imperturbable servant who had approached noiselessly.

At her Sunday dinners Mrs. Cortland disregarded official precedence as far as possible, and as the informality of these occasions was generally understood, an ambassador considered himself fortunate if placed between two débutantes.

On reaching the dining-room Violet found herself between Komlossy and Maitland. This arrangement pleased her. Maitland was a novelty and, if he bored her, the little Hungarian was always a tonic. She had felt decidedly depressed all day. Sunday was always unsatisfactory. She looked forward to it as a day of rest, but she was usually overwhelmed with visitors, or when it rained, as it had that day, she was bored by solitude. But the sight of Mrs. Cortland's table revived her spirits. The candles, the silver, the harmonious color

scheme of the decorations all combined to put her in a better humor, and she glanced about at the women's gowns with the gratifying consciousness that no one was better dressed than she.

"Have you taken them all in, Miss Duncan?" said Maitland, who had been watching her.

"Yes, I think I have."

"Then you can tell me who are wearing last year's gowns made over."

"That can be easily told by the expression of a woman's face. There is a self-consciousness in the possession of a new dress that few can disguise."

"Then there is something beside love which a woman's face cannot dissemble."

"But a woman can always conceal love when it suits her purpose."

"Not from the man she loves."

Violet laughed. "What a thoroughly conceited member of your sex you must be."

"You misunderstand me. I am merely talking theoretically, not from experience."

"I suppose you wish me to believe that you are one of those insufferable men

who insist that they have never been in love."

"On the contrary I have never been loved."

"How fulsomely modest."

Maitland sipped his sherry. "One must love several times before learning how to win love."

"So you think you are a master of the art."

"I am confident of it," he said half laughing.

Violet looked into his face. His assurance was so good-natured and preposterous that it was scarcely definable as conceit.

"You must tell me your modus operandi," she said; "then I shall know how to guard myself against such fascinators as you."

"That is exactly what I do not intend to do."

"And why?" said Violet, arching her eyebrows, inquisitively.

"Because I am firmly convinced that I shall fall in love with you."

"How delightful! then I shall have the amusement of disproving your theory."

"On the contrary I expect you to demonstrate it. You must admit that I play fair."

"You are certainly abrupt, but I am tempted to think you impertinent," said Violet turning towards Komlossy.

Maitland laughed.

"You are a colossal fraud," she said to the Hungarian. "I saw you before dinner, wedged in between Mrs. Rivers and Mrs. Love, smiling at both of them. Did you pick up an invitation or two?"

The minister laughed with a little chuckle like the cackle of a hen. "What a mind reader you are. Now to confess the truth I had an evening disengaged next week, and I had to do something. I cannot dine alone, it bores me."

"And now you will have the distinguished honor of meeting me at Mrs. Rivers on Thursday evening at half after eight."

"Precisely. Was it not worth while? Mrs. Rivers is a worthy soul, and her cook is divine."

"She is a widow, Komlossy; you might marry her for the sake of the cook."

The diplomat made a wry face.

"To see her every day would destroy my appetite; then I could no longer appreciate the cook."

"But I honestly think it time for you to marry some one."

"Alas, yes, but I grow more particular and less desirable every day."

"I should like to see you married,—it would be such sport."

"Mademoiselle, for woman marriage is inevitable, for man it is insanity."

"There is evidently insanity in your father's family. Take care, it may break out suddenly in a violent form, such as Mrs. Rivers, or her cook."

"If ever I marry it will be with a cook. Then I may scold her as much as I please and she cannot give warning."

"A case of connubial bluster for culinary bliss."

"Exactly, and speaking of matrimony that reminds me that I had a long argument with a woman last week as to whether you would eventually make a permanent alliance with the war department."

"How preposterous," laughed Violet; "and which side did you take."

"The affirmative."

"I thought you were more discerning than that."

"I based my argument on the fact that a woman almost invariably marries the wrong man, and that persistence accomplishes more than perfection."

"If ever I marry it will be without premeditation," said Violet, thoughtfully. "Should I take time to think, I could not do it."

"Let me make a prophesy. You will marry within a year. At present you do not love the man you expect to marry, nor do you expect to marry the man you love."

"In the name of goodness talk to your neighbor," said Violet. "You are positively insane."

"I am a clairvoyant, mademoiselle. I am never mistaken, but I obey, and herewith offer my scintillant wit at the more appreciative shrine of Miss Birdie Day. Au revoir."

Komlossy turned away abruptly, and had soon engaged his neighbor in conversation.

For a while Violet ate in silence. Maitland was talking earnestly to buxom old

Mrs. Love, whose gown was so tight that it crackled every time she breathed. Violet wondered why so few women know how to grow old gracefully.

Then she thought of Jack Hardy. He despised the great world for its insincerity. To her, human nature was the same in any sphere. People were heartless, cold, and selfish in Springfield as they were in Washington. The proportion of genuineness was much the same, if anything, greater in the society which was not stinted by narrow-mindedness and bigotry. Jack Hardy was a visionary. His world of honest men and noble women was an Utopia, therefore the true solution was to take the world as it is. Be exalted and bored by the good, amused and shocked by the bad. Her philosophy was live and let live. None was all bad, none all good. The greatest altruism was amusement, and boredom the most stupid egoism. The only way to be happy was to be amused, and the only way to be amused was to keep from being bored. She loved society because society was amusing. Provincialism was the essence of stupidity, but wilfully to prefer provincialism as Jack

would have her do, was little short of insanity. She smiled at her own logic. It was so thoroughly the logic of youth.

"Won't you let me share that thought?" said Maitland, who for a moment had been watching her intently.

"No, it is too sincere for your appreciation."

"Do you think me wholly insincere then?"

"I scarcely know you, Mr. Maitland."

"The sincerity of a man, Miss Duncan, depends upon the woman he first loves sincerely."

"That is just like a man. A woman must be held responsible for his lack of character. But I think it depends on his mother rather than his sweetheart."

"I am glad you are so skeptical, you afford such a delightful field for the propagandist."

"Ah, but remember it is far easier to proselytise a heathen than an atheist. You see I do not believe in any god in the shape of man."

"Then I shall make you believe in me."

"A boastful threat, indeed; how will you begin?"

"I shall begin by asking you to pass me those almonds."

"Which task I perform complacently," said Violet, placing a silver dish before him.

"Good, obedience is a tenet of every belief."

"Ah, but a woman is often obedient to the man she hates, and obdurate to him she loves."

Maitland played with the stem of his glass. "After all," he said, "it is absurd to deliberate about love. Love is spontaneous."

"That is a creed after my own heart," said Violet enthusiastically; "I have often said that if ever I love it will be without intention."

"I imagine," Maitland said softly, "that those you might have loved have been too persistent. They have wearied you by much loving, they have wearied you by much servility. Is it not so?"

"Yes," Violet answered thoughtfully.

For a moment Maitland was silent. "Do

you believe in palmistry, Miss Duncan?" he said finally.

"Only partially. I think the hand shows one's breeding rather more than one's character."

"I should like to tell your hand; perhaps I might convert you?"

"That word, 'perhaps,' implies doubt. I thought your self-confidence was unbounded."

Maitland smiled. "The only doubt I feel is lest you should not permit me to make the attempt."

"Then I set your doubt at rest. You may come to-morrow at five if you will."

"Thank you."

The guests were leaving the table. Komlossy walked with Violet to the drawing-room.

"You must beware of Mr. Maitland," he said as he was leaving her; "he is a dangerous man."

"Really," said Violet.

"I have warned you," said the little Magyar. Then he wandered to the smoking-room, where a group of men were

"MAITLAND SAT APART, QUIETLY SMOKING HIS CIGAR."

already discussing the Peruvian difficulty and the policy of the government.

Maitland sat apart quietly smoking his cigar. He was thinking over the conversation he had had with Violet. "She is a clever girl," he thought, "and beautiful; what a pity she is poor." Then a remark he overheard attracted his attention.

"I tell you Duncan is the power of this administration," said the speaker. "The President does nothing without consulting him."

"I must have Secretary Duncan's support," he thought, "and the winning of it will not be uninteresting."

IV

"IN THE PALM OF THE HAND."
Comedy of Errors, III. 2.

Love is sometimes a question of preference, more often of predicament. Had Violet remained in Springfield she would undoubtedly have fallen in love with Jack Hardy. He was a cut above the Springfield youth, and she was thrown with him constantly. But her father's term of office expired when she was seventeen and then she was taken to Europe by her mother for two years of travel.

Jack Hardy went back to his regiment, and amid the sterile influences of a frontier post, Violet was the one memory he cherished. In Europe Violet met many men, and Jack Hardy became one of many memories. That was the difference.

It is a dangerous moment in an American girl's life when she discovers the provincialism of her nearest relatives and friends. Flushed with the first enthusiasm

of a superficial cosmopolitanism, acquired by a cursory contact with European life, she becomes to a certain degree a fanatic. Her family and friends appear to her eyes ungainly heretics to be converted to the refined tenets of the cosmopolitan creed. Their accent, the harsh tones of their voices, their clothes, completely dwarf their characters, and howsoever sterling the qualities of their natures may be, they become unsympathetic and unendurable through the heinous fault of provincialism.

Violet's snobbery, if such it might be called, was induced by the suddenness with which she realised the shortcomings of her family and friends. She went to Europe at an impressionable age, imbued with all the prejudices and provincialisms of an American town. At first she affected to despise the effete mannerisms of a decaying civilization, but unconsciously her eyes were opened to a sense of her own shortcomings. There was a sharp pang of mortification, a realisation of her imperfection, and then she set to work studiously to undo the past. She trained her voice to a softer inflexion, she studied the accent of each word she

spoke, and the result was a careful though somewhat apparent imitation.

Mrs. Duncan died shortly after she returned to America. She had been a quiet, unassuming woman, who had entered her daughter's life rather negatively. Violet's ambitions were beyond her mother's comprehension. Mrs. Duncan idolized but never understood her daughter, so the two women shared each other's love but not each other's sympathy. Her mother's death consequently was a blow from which Violet recovered. She experienced a vague sorrow rather than a distinct loss, but the year of mourning was dreary and difficult.

Violet had outgrown her old friends and there were no new ones to be made in Springfield. Solitude was her only resource, and with the solitude came a restless longing for excitement. She read European papers and European books, and tried to imagine herself far removed from her surroundings. The result was ineffable boredom, that curse of super-civilized womanhood.

She corresponded occasionally with Jack Hardy. His letters were toned with an in-

comprehensible optimism. How could one find contentment at Fort Niobrara? she wondered.

The presidential campaign developed a new interest. Her father entered heart and soul into politics and she shared his enthusiasm. He "stumped the state" in the interests of his party, and she accompanied him to the "hustings," to transplant an Anglican expression. Among the grangers of the "Egypt" district she found some diversion. They at least were not commonplace. Originality, however crude the form, is diverting, and Violet was vastly amused by the quaint farmers of Southern Illinois. Their homely intelligence, their curious speech, their political fervor, all appealed to her, and for the moment she forgot herself.

Then came the election and with it the triumph of her party. Governor Duncan was the leader in Illinois, and was spoken of prominently for a cabinet position. Violet's anxiety became intense, but her father took the matter philosophically. He had won the state for his party, and felt entitled to the reward. But presidents are pro-

verbially ungrateful, so he asked and expected nothing. Violet urged her father to manipulate the wires at his command. He stoically refused, saying that his record was thoroughly known. His appointment would be "good politics" and importunity would merely weaken his position.

Finally, with the inauguration of the President came the announcement of the cabinet and the realisation of Violet's hopes. With the keenness of a liberated prisoner she breathed the free air of the world again. No more of the restrictions of Springfield, but Washington with all its kaleidoscopic brilliancy.

Social Washington has a tangent. It is the long line of official receptions where the bureaucratic and aristocratic circles touch but do not intersect. The wife of the country congressman who fancies that her husband's election to the house secures for her a seat in society is liable to disappointment, for in Washington, as elsewhere in America, society considers the brilliancy of a man an acquisition, but the good breeding of his wife is a necessity.

In Europe a woman may take rank from

her husband, but in America a husband takes social rank from his wife. Society is an oligarchy of, for, and by the women. The men admitted are of but two kinds, those who pay attention and those who pay bills. The former must be attractive, the latter merely the husbands of attractive women. This feminine oligarchy exists in Washington as it does elsewhere in America. Officialism has nothing to do with it. The officials who are invited within its folds are chosen by virtue of their wives, not their offices.

Violet was readily accepted by the Washingtonians. She was beautiful; she had learned the signs and passwords of society in Europe, and her father was Secretary of War. Money is fortunately less of a social requisite in Washington than elsewhere in America; brains are even a recommendation, so that Violet's quick intelligence and rare tact were readily appreciated. At last she was in her element. Society became her passion.

Jack Hardy, called to fill a post in the War Department, stood by and watched the development of the woman he loved.

He watched her grow in beauty, tact and intelligence; he admired the consummate skill with which she won and held her supremacy, but he knew that she was drifting far away from him. Yet she charmed and fascinated him, and while disapproving most his love was strongest. He watched her with the jealous eye of a lover, but never uttered a word of love. All the world knew his secret but he fancied that it was buried deep in his breast. He was content for the time with the privileges of a friendship he dared not break. Jack Hardy was sincere and manly, but he lacked subtlety and dash—he lacked the power to charm.

On the afternoon following Mrs. Cortland's dinner Violet was sitting in her drawing-room, idly scanning the pages of a French novel. She was expecting Ritchie Maitland, and occasionally her thoughts turned to him. She confessed that he was an enigma. She did not exactly like him, but he interested her. She was sure he was insincere, but he was inscrutable, that meant that he was worth studying. The book in her lap was Paul

Bourget's "Un Cœur de Femme." As she ran over the pages she wondered if Maitland were not such a man as Casal—a magnetic creature, whose power lay in his boldness, who was selfish even in love. Perhaps.

A servant entered and announced "Mr. Maitland."

Violet glanced up languidly.

He is good-looking, she thought, thoroughly groomed, thoroughly self-possessed. His hair was too smoothly brushed. She felt a desire to rumple it.

"How do you do, Mr. Maitland?" she said, extending her hand.

"I am rather seedy. I met some old colleagues at the club last night; we talked until four this morning."

"How stupid."

"Yes, I just got up in time to call on Mrs. Cortland, and come here."

"How very prompt you are. Was it necessary to see her to-day?"

"No, but it is a continental habit to pay for a dinner immediately with a pasteboard, and start again with a clean score."

"Was she at home?"

"Very much at home. There was an ambassador there, not to mention a minister or two, and a number of humbler satellites like myself."

"Mrs. Cortland is an amusing woman; her originality is refreshing."

"Yes, to me she is about as refreshing as a summer drink. She is very cool and she makes me hot."

"You do not like her," said Violet.

"On the contrary she does not like me."

"She has never spoken ill of you to me."

"But my intuition in such matters is infallible."

"Which reminds me," said Violet, taking a paper knife from the table and playing with it, "of your boasted infallibility as a chiromancer."

"Yes, palmistry is my religion. I even go to the scriptures for its tenets."

"How perfectly absurd," said Violet.

"Not at all. In Proverbs there is a line which says, 'Length of days is in her right hand, riches and honor in her left,' and in Samuel, 'What evil is in my hand?' "

"There must be some good in it if it has made you read the Bible," laughed Violet.

"Let me see your hand, perhaps I can convince you."

Violet, smiling incredulously, put out her hand.

Maitland examined it minutely, the formation, the shape of the fingers, the texture, nothing escaped his careful glance.

"Now the right hand," he said after a few moments of careful study.

Violet watched his face. He was evidently deeply absorbed and serious.

"Well," she said finally, "are n't you going to tell me anything?"

"I have to study the hands carefully to see how one characteristic affects another. For instance you have what is called the conic hand. That means that you are impulsive, artistic, and fond of luxury. You are essentially emotional, but that is counteracted to a great extent by your splendid will power."

"Where do you find that?"

"In the thumb. The thumb individualizes a person. Yours shows that you are often able to control your natural impulses."

He then examined her fingers. "Your fingers are long," he said. "Long-fingered

people are exact in matters of dress, careful about the amenities of life, extremely fond of detail. They worry over little things, and are apt to be affected."

"I am glad to know I am affected. What else that is awful do you find?" said Violet, rather resentfully.

"I find that you are independent in thought, extremely proud, and very ambitious; all that is in the fingers, they bend back, too, which means that you are affable and clever, a success socially, I should say."

"But the lines of the hand, you have said nothing about them yet?"

"But I have looked at them," smiled Maitland. "Before I get through I shall know you more intimately than you know yourself."

"What a horrible prospect," she said, pretending to stifle a yawn. One's self is, however, invariably an attractive topic, and Violet was no exception to the rule. She was intensely interested in what Maitland was saying. Her languid manner was assumed.

"How thoroughly ambitious you are,"

said Maitland smiling, "and yet how thoroughly feminine at heart. This mount at the base of the first finger, the mount of Jupiter, is strangely developed, there is the ambition, pride and love of power again, but the line of the heart is deep, clear and well colored. It rises too in Jupiter and runs to the side of the hand. Yes, you are capable of great love and jealousy. Your life will be a struggle between pride and love."

"And of course love will conquer. It always does."

Maitland smiled. "You have not been in love yet, nothing more than a flirtation or two."

"That is the first true thing you have said."

"But love is coming, and that very soon. I see two breaks in the heart line. You will have two disappointments in love, one through folly or caprice, the other through pride."

"Will the gentleman be dark or fair?" Violet asked, sarcastically.

"One of them will give you trouble enough. See that line here on Mars, run-

ning down into the life line; he will make the running hard."

"Do I marry him?"

"No, but there are two of them, you know. The first disappointment will be through your own folly. A man will jilt you I should say."

"That is comforting. And the second?"

"There pride steps in. It is probably revenge for the first. You may become engaged to a man you do not love."

Violet was silent a moment.

"I think you are clever," she said, finally, "as an observer of character, but I do not believe that you can predict the future."

"Time will tell. For my part I believe it fully."

"And your own hand?" she asked.

"No one has ever studied my hand. It is bad, very bad."

"You might show me, you know I do not believe."

Maitland hesitated a moment, then he turned his palm so that she might see the lines.

"But I know nothing."

"Would you have me show myself up?"

"Yes."

He laughed curiously. "There," he said, "is my heart line. It rises in Saturn, is short and high in hand; it is thin and pale, and the head line rises towards it almost joining it. That all means that I am cold, selfish and designing, that my head governs my heart, and that I shall never experience genuine love."

"And I think none the less of you," said Violet. "You are too frank to be selfish and designing."

"I am selfish," he said bitterly. "I have had enough hard knocks to make me so."

Violet looked at him quizzically. "You impress me as a person to whom everything comes," she said. "Your manner is confident. You have faith in your own power. Such people always succeed."

"You are clever," he said slowly, looking into her eyes.

"No, I am merely observant."

"Which is all there is to cleverness."

"No, sometimes it is the gift of expressing platitudes picturesquely."

Maitland laughed.

"All of which leads to nothing or means nothing," he said. "What were we talking about?"

"Yourself. How did you digress?"

"Because the subject was distasteful."

"Most men adore talking about themselves."

"Or rather their love affairs. I am different, because I have had none. I would prefer talking about you, or on second thought, I should prefer to go. You as a subject are too absorbing, I might outstay my welcome."

"Yes, you would better not talk about me," she said; "I have no patience with men who talk about me to my face, and no respect for those who talk about me behind my back."

"How cruel," he said, leaving his seat. "When I am with you I must confine my admiration to my eyes, and when I am away I must keep it entirely in my thoughts. That is a difficult task."

"And I am an exacting task master."

"Take care," he said, laughingly, "the

more exacting you are the more I shall care for you."

"I might even endure that if you are sufficiently devoted."

"That I will never be," said Maitland. "Women despise devoted men."

Violet did not reply. She looked thoughtfully at the floor. She was thinking of Jack Hardy.

"Good-bye," said Maitland, extending his hand.

"Good-bye," she answered rather suddenly.

"Remember all I have told you," he said holding her hand for a moment. "The unhappiness is coming very soon. Your own folly will bring it. You see I have warned you."

"Yes, but what use is a warning? One acts from impulse, warnings only frighten one."

"Then be very frightened," he answered, taking a step towards the door, "that may avert the evil."

"But if it is fate?" she said tossing back her head suddenly.

He did not hear. He had gone.

V

"THEIR PURPOSE IS TO PARLE, TO COURT AND DANCE."

Love's Labour's Lost, V. 2.

The Honorable Silas Smith was a Western senator whose favorite haunt was Chamberlain's. He wore sleek broadcloth clothes and a slouch hat; his chin was ornamented with a tuft of scraggy gray whiskers and his watch was guarded by a massive gold chain. A well chewed cigar was ever between his lips, and his hands were ever in his pockets. He had been an early settler, and he was the richest man in his state, two necessary elements of popularity with Western legislatures. As long as he continued to act as the attorney for his state without regard to the interests of the nation at large, and to tap his "barrel" on demand, he had reasonable hopes of retaining his seat in the senate until decrepitude should force his retirement.

Silas Smith had but two passions, adula-

tion and poker. He delighted in the consideration of his fellow-men. He was in his own opinion a man of national importance, representing a great commonwealth, and the true senatorial dignity was never absent from his manner, unless perhaps when he was gathered with a few boon colleagues about a green-covered table; and the senatorial game was at its height. Then he was in his element. Perhaps he actually forgot the existence of Mrs. Silas Smith, a difficult task for a man so much married.

"Mrs. Senator Smith," as the society reporters persisted in calling her, in direct defiance of titular usage, was a snappy little woman with tightly-drawn skin and little piercing eyes, who spent the greater portion of her life in fluttering in and out of official drawing-rooms on the official afternoons at home. Her wizened face, with its sharp outlines and ringlets of gray hair plastered on the sallow forehead, was everywhere present. She had few friends, but she had built a palace in Dupont Circle and her only daughter had just made her bow to society. Mrs. Smith had been persistent in her efforts, and people were begin-

ning to treat her with some consideration. She was often met in unofficial drawing-rooms, and the smart young diplomats and department clerks began to include her in their round of Sunday calls, while Phoebe Smith, the daughter, was invited everywhere.

Miss Smith was one of those mouse-like girls who steal in and out of a room so quietly that their presence is unnoticed; an inoffensive person, whom it was difficult to recognize except by her gowns, and as she changed these frequently, she was being continually forgotten by the people she had met. However, she was often asked to dance by the young men, who were able to remember her, and her admiring mother considered her a great social success.

Perhaps the senator's millions were an item not lost sight of by the dancing men. It was even rumored that one or two of them had asked her hand in marriage. At least they no longer asked her to dance. Mrs. Smith, however, had great aspirations for Phoebe; a department clerk was not to be considered.

It was a master-stroke of diplomacy which

prompted Mrs. Smith to give a dance, not so much the giving of the dance, however, as the selection of Dick Willing to lead the cotillon. He threw such dash into his leading and was so immensely popular with the younger girls that any function he managed was sure to be a pronounced success.

But it took a great exercise of tact on the part of Mrs. Smith to obtain his co-operation. Dick Willing was an old Washingtonian and shared the old Washingtonian distaste for parvenus, but after some months of delicate manœuvring, during which Dick was frequently placed under social obligations to Mrs. Smith, she finally broached the subject of her dance, and the young man found himself in a position where a refusal was impossible.

He was given carte blanche and free access to the senator's bank account. Sherry was to come on from New York to serve the supper. There was to be a Hungarian orchestra from the metropolis to alternate with the Marine band, and the green-houses of Washington were to be stripped bare to supply the floral decorations.

Dick Willing said that if he must undertake the task, he would give people something to talk about, and they did talk for days before the event. The wildest rumors were floating about. Mrs. Cortland said she had heard that diamond brooches were to be given as favors, and Komlossy stated that he knew positively that coffee was to be served in gold cups studded with precious stones, such as are used by the Sultan; while General Lloyd whispered about as the most astonishing story of all, that Senator Smith had been persuaded to discard his watch chain, and would appear in a suit of evening clothes imported from London especially for the occasion. Somebody even hinted that the senator would treat his cronies in the smoking-room to Scotch and soda instead of bourbon, but nobody believed that.

Dick Willing carefully supervised the invitation list so that only the smartest people were invited. The number was necessarily small, because Mrs. Smith did not know all the smart people, and in spite of the remonstrances of the senator that all his friends were left out, no one was invited

who would not add distinction to the occasion.

Of course numerous senatorial and congressional "ladies" were furious at being excluded, and many vows of vengeance were registered against "Mrs. Senator Smith." The senator even was treated with marked coolness by some of his colleagues, but Mrs. Smith wore a triumphant smile. She was "getting there" at last.

"My dear Mrs. Cortland," said Komlossy to his companion as they entered Mrs. Smith's drawing-room on the eventful evening of the dance; "I should call this the age of persistent parvenus."

"And perverted peers," added Mrs. Cortland.

"Yes, money will now buy even a peer."

"But the parvenu of to-day is the peer of to-morrow."

"Alas, yes," said Komlossy, mournfully. "In feudal days the aristocracy owned the money; now money owns the aristocracy."

"And why not? To be a millionaire means to be a successful man. As Napoleon said: 'It is greater to be an ancestor than merely a descendant.'"

"But wealth to be attractive requires age; it must be old and crusty like good port. New-made wealth is crude and vulgar. I hate new things. I hate mushroom millionaires."

"Society must be fed. Society must be amused. What would society be without millionaires to give extravagant parties? Merely a collection of insolvent blue-bloods bemoaning the past."

"At least they would have ancestors."

"Who stole cattle, butchered men and bought titles for themselves, while our millionaires rob men, butcher cattle and buy titles for their daughters. What is the difference? Merely one of age and opportunity."

"I see you are incorrigible," said the little man, "so let us sit down here and watch the arrivals. The manner in which people enter a drawing-room forms an interesting character study."

Mrs. Smith stood near the door greeting her guests. It was the proudest, happiest moment of her life. As one by one the best people of the capital filed past her, she

felt the exultant thrill a conqueror might feel in surveying a victorious field. Meek, docile Phoebe Smith stood beside her mother and smirked. Even she felt a tremor of satisfaction, but the expression on the senator's face was of resigned martyrdom. He fidgeted in his new clothes, he plunged his hands in his pockets, but remembering his wife's admonition, he drew them out hurriedly with a sheepish side glance. Then he wandered about the room and tried in vain to feel at home until he spied a colleague whose wife also had social ambitions. Senator Smith heartily greeted the new-comer with "Hello, Jones, let 's have a drink," and two broad-shouldered solons disappeared through a neighboring door, and were seen no more until the host was hurriedly summoned to take the wife of the British ambassador to supper.

"There goes your friend, Ritchie Maitland," said Mrs. Cortland to her companion. "The most discontented people in the world are dismissed diplomats. I think it would be a charity to behead them actually as well as officially."

"It would be less barbarous to keep them in office during good behavior, and reward their efforts by promotion."

"But that is undemocratic. Rotation in office you know."

"Then why not rotate the army officers. It is quite as logical, and would make so many more generals to wear rosettes in their buttonholes. I have never been able to understand the fondness of you democrats for titles and decorations. But then democracies are after all merely inconsistencies."

"And I have never been able to understand the extreme delight foreigners take in finding fault with American peccadillos; why not judge us by our triumphs, not our trivialities."

"Because America is a big, over-grown, precocious child, and the peccadillos of the child, unless corrected, become the vices of the man. We take a father's interest in you, that is all."

"Rather the jealousy of a father who cannot see his offspring outstrip himself."

"With you Americans patriotism is self-complacency; with us it is self-sacrifice."

The minister said this rather snappishly. Mrs. Cortland merely smiled.

"Fancy you sacrificing yourself on any altar, unless there be a goddess named Culina. Even then the sacrifice would be merely one of digestion."

"How rude you are to-night," said the minister.

"No, I am merely disappointing. The women flatter you so much that an occasional truth is unendurable."

"Ritchie Maitland, I believe, not I, is the subject of discussion."

"Very well, what do you think of him?"

"My opinion would be too complacent. Yours might have a dash of caustic.

"To me he seems merely an office-seeker."

"Most Americans are that."

"But he belongs to the obsequious, not the obstreperous type."

"How do you distinguish them?" asked Komlossy.

"Why the latter comes to Washington with a brass band, and the indorsement of everybody in his state from sheriff to senator; he gets a refusal or at most a coun-

try post-office. The former makes himself indispensable to some politician and gets what he wants."

"Then you think Mr. Maitland will succeed?"

"I think he is too clever; he has too many irons in the fire. If he would stick to General Lloyd, for instance, and let the others alone, his efforts would be less apparent and more probable of success."

"I should advise him to make love to Violet Duncan. Men rule the world, and women rule the men."

"Violet is too clever to be taken in."

"Clever women are usually taken in by men. It is the silly women who take men in.'

"Violet has seen too many men to be fooled by mere cleverness. The man who wins her must have a heart as well as an intellect."

"We shall see," said Komlossy, cynically. "In the meantime let us walk about and see all the gorgeousness. What a pity they have taken the price marks off. I should like to know what it all cost."

Violet Duncan entered the room. Her beauty was commanding; her carriage was perfect. Many a faultless face is ruined by a faulty walk. Beauty to be truly beautiful must be dignified; when it is of the dainty, dimpled order, it is merely prettiness. Violet was truly beautiful; men and even women paused to admire.

"What a pity she is poor," said Mrs. Elliott. "She was born to be a duchess."

"And dukes have a disagreeable habit of marrying ducats. Have n't they?" put in Mrs. Love.

"She is so stately," said General Lloyd.

"And so cold," added Mrs. Love.

"Just like a statue," said Mrs. Elliott. "An exquisite creation with a heart of marble."

"I wonder whom she will marry?" asked the General.

"A millionaire, of course, whom else could she marry?" replied Mrs. Love.

"She would do honor to a king," answered the General tartly. Then he walked away abruptly.

"I actually believe General Lloyd has

hopes himself, do n't you, dear?" said Mrs. Love.

"Aspirations would be the better term," replied Mrs. Elliott. "Violet Duncan would make an ideal wife for an aspiring politician. General Lloyd is ambitious and rich. Violet is poor and tactful. Who knows what might happen? See, he is talking to her now."

"How clever you are, dear," said Mrs. Love.

General Lloyd joined the little group of men who had already surrounded Violet.

"I am sorry, Mr. Richards," she was saying, "but I promised to dance the cotillon with Mr. Maitland, at least a week ago."

"The fourth dance did you say Captain Smith. No, you can 't have that, but the fifth; will that do?"

"Please Mees Duncan," pleaded Count Albuquerque; "one little dance for me, and not a valse. I cannot dance him."

"The sixth, but you must remember it yourself. I am sure I shall forget that far ahead."

"I shall remember it always," said the

count, clicking his heels together and bowing.

"I cannot dance, but may I admire?" said General Lloyd, with old-time suavity. "One glance at the queen, is all I ask."

"Beautiful! General," said Violet; "but how many women have you already said that to this evening? I am sure I could name at least three."

The General frowned.

"Miss Duncan," he said, "the value of a compliment lies in its intention. My intention was truthful. Were I courageous I would ask you to walk with me to the next room, where it is cool, and there is a capital punch."

"Then as you are timid I will ask you," she said, taking his arm.

There was a twanging of cymballos, a tremor of violins, as the strains of a waltz burst forth in weird, Hungarian rhythm.

"Oh, dear," said Violet; "I have promised this dance. I hope he won't find me, he is such a silly little man, and he treads on one's toes so distressingly."

"Miss Duncan," called an effeminate voice at her elbow; "I think this is our

dance. I have been watching you for ever so long. I feared I might not find you when the time came."

"How considerate," said Violet; "you must excuse me, General Lloyd."

"With reluctance."

Violet patiently placed her arm on the little man's shoulder; she had forgotten his name though she had a painful recollection of having danced with him before. For a full minute he jumped up and down on his toes counting one, two, three, one, two, three, to himself; but his efforts to catch the time were fruitless, and finally in desperation he whirled Violet away with perspiring, frenzied disregard of all terpsichorean tempo.

General Lloyd watched them intently. In and out of the maze of waltzers they went; the little man struggling, tramping, gyrating; Violet, with the ease and grace of a perfect dancer, doing her best to avoid a catastrophe.

An expression of pain crossed her face suddenly. The General remembered her toes. Then she smiled sweetly at her discomfited partner.

"What are you thinking about, General?" asked Mrs. Love, who was standing next him. "You look so intense."

"I was thinking that there is but one thing so deceptive as a pretty woman's smile."

"And that is?"

"Her words."

"Pretty women are not all insincere."

"No, some are merely inconstant."

"You are very disagreeable, General."

"No, I am merely discerning. A plain woman's constancy is the work of Providence; that of a pretty woman depends very much upon the man she falls in love with."

"What a lot of infidelity you must be responsible for," said Mrs. Love, with a sarcastic chuckle.

"I hate that woman," mused the General, as he moved away.

Supper was served in a temporary room built for the occasion. The walls were covered with Syrian draperies. Here and there palms and foliage plants were massed profusely, while the white tables were heaped with roses. A subdued light was shed by hanging lamps of bronze and countless

shaded candles. The music of guitars and mandolins mingled with laughter.

Violet paused in the doorway. She was with Jack Hardy. They were looking for seats.

Some people were just leaving a small table in the farther corner of the room.

"There is a place, Jack," she said. "Run and get it before it is taken. I will follow."

Hardy departed to secure the table. Maitland, who had been watching an opportunity to speak to Violet, approached quickly.

"You would not take supper with me," he said, "and I am unwilling to be with any one else; will you not grant me a seat at your table? It will be a charity, not a favor."

"To do charity is always a pleasure. I am glad you put it in the light of charity."

At the sight of Maitland, Hardy glowered. He had asked Violet to take supper with him some ten days previously, and he considered Maitland's intrusion an impertinence. He was not a diplomat, so instead

of outshining his rival, he sulked,—a dangerous experiment for a man in love.

Maitland took in the situation at a glance, and smiled to himself. Violet made several ineffectual attempts at a pacification, which Hardy refused to accept; then she finally turned to talk to Maitland.

It was exactly what Mr. Ritchie Maitland wanted, and exactly what he had planned. He had been studiously civil to Hardy, and Violet thought that Jack was behaving peevishly.

"I wonder, Mr. Maitland," said Violet, "if you are affected by your surroundings. Could you be unhappy in a ball-room?"

"A cruel glance could make me unhappy anywhere."

"That remark is trite. You can do better, I am sure."

"Truths are always trite because they are so apparent. It is only a brilliant lie which dazzles."

"Then lie to me."

"I fear I should fail in that also, except in that the spoken truth would be half a lie because words could only half express my admiration."

"That is better. Yes, I like you better as a liar."

"I should outshine Ananias if it would make you like me."

"Ananias was a clumsy tyro," put in Jack Hardy. "Diplomacy had not been invented in his day."

"There was no need for diplomacy then," said Maitland; "soldiers were always ready to fight."

Hardy blushed angrily.

"The pouring of oil on troubled waters is an ancient art at least," said Violet with a disapproving glance at Jack.

He smothered the retort which had been on his lips.

"Were I a cynic," said Maitland, raising his glass, "I should say that love inspires the ecstasy of an hour, but when its exhilaration is over, it leaves regrets for the excesses it has led us into."

"Such remarks make one doubt human nature," said Violet; "or at least doubt the man who makes them."

"Do n't forget that I am lying to please you."

"The way to please me is to be true to yourself. I hate insincerity."

There was a tone of resentment in Violet's voice; a tone betraying a certain interest in Maitland, which he was quick to notice.

"I am sincere," he said earnestly; "but sincerity is at such a discount nowadays that one often tries to disguise one's true feelings by flippant words."

"A sincere person never trifles," said Hardy.

"Trifling is purely adventitious," answered Maitland with studied indifference. "But insincerity is intentional, therefore it resembles incivility."

"I think," said Violet coldly, "that a ball-room conversation should be purely incidental. Sentiments are best left unexpressed. Shall we go back now?" she continued, rising from her seat. "We all seem to have finished."

Maitland walked with Violet, and Jack Hardy followed sulkily. Hardy was not naturally rude; on the contrary he was big-hearted and generous, but he was in love, and rudeness to a rival is a prerogative of a

man in love. Perhaps he did not consider Maitland in the light of a rival, but he was an interloper whom Violet seemed distinctly to favor. Jack knew that in their conversational tilt he had been no match for the ex-diplomat. He had lost his temper, always a confession of weakness, and he felt heartily ashamed of himself.

When they reached the ball-room the cotillon was commencing. Hardy had no heart for dancing. He stood with a group of men, thronging a doorway.

Maitland was a master dancer. As he guided Violet through the crowded ball-room she felt that she had never met his equal. The music was enchanting, the floor perfection. Silently they waltzed awhile, then she said: "Why did you send me these yellow roses, they are the color of jealousy?"

"Because you make me realize that jealousy is a possibility."

"But not a probability. Love precedes jealousy, and you are too selfish to love any one."

"Love is the most selfish of sentiments; its demands are so exacting."

"That is a man's idea; a woman's love is absolutely unselfish."

"Could you be unselfish, that is to say, generous to me, I wonder?"

His glance, usually so cold, for the moment was strangely sympathetic. Violet did not reply. She closed her eyes and tried to shut out a thought. Their steps moved on to the enchanting music. In the darkness she seemed to be carried dreamily through space toward some great danger. But the thought was fascinating. The music stopped; for a moment they danced on, but she was back in the noisy world of people. She laughed at her foolish fancy.

"You are so very quiet to-night," he said. "It is unlike you."

"Would you wish me to prattle incessantly?"

"No, but when you are silent it makes me doubtful of my effort to please."

"Then it is all an effort?"

"Certainly," he laughed, "when I exert myself it means that I am anxious to please. I am usually too indifferent to take the trouble."

She did not reply. His words hurt her,

they were unlike what she had expected; so selfish, so brutal. A young ensign handed her a bunch of roses. Violet smiled and thanked him. As he whirled her away among the dancers she turned and looked at Maitland reproachfully. He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. Jack Hardy saw him. "The cad," he muttered. Then he turned away and wandered into the smoking-room.

"What 's Maitland's game?" he heard a man saying.

Hardy stopped to listen.

"Why, London of course. You do n't suppose a chap like that is in Washington for his health?" There were several in the group—two or three department clerks and a foreign secretary.

"He does his work neatly," said another. "Approaches Secretary Duncan through his daughter. It 's an old dodge but it always works."

Hardy felt an impulse to strike the fellow. There are times when a man longs for a return to the days of duelling. Why could not Violet see Maitland as he saw him; as all the world saw him? But Hardy

was merely a fretful, sensitive man in love. He hated the world and everybody in it—except Violet.

In the ball-room Violet was triumphant. The floor behind her chair was heaped with favors. She was ever in the throng of dancers, tall, lithe, radiant, a goddess to whom every one bowed—at least every man.

"What a pity Violet Duncan romps so," said Mrs. Elliott in a whisper; "it is undignified."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Love; "she is too tall to make herself so prominent."

"I do n't like her dress, do you?"

"No, it 's too fussy."

"And such a hanging skirt."

"I wish she would go to a decent dressmaker."

"Poor dear, she can 't afford it."

Meanwhile an aide-de-camp away over in the corner was arguing violently with his partner to the effect that, unless a woman was beautiful, her other talents, howsoever worthy, counted for naught.

"Look at Violet Duncan," he said; "she would be a success if she did n't have an idea in her head."

"I am afraid you are right. Violet has n't an idea in her head, unless it be the idea that she is a raving beauty."

Just then three men ran a race the length of the room to see who could reach Violet first. A girl almost as pretty as Violet favored the soldier with an appreciation for beauty, and his partner, a general's daughter, at whose shrine he had been sacrificed by duty, was left alone in the corner picking to pieces the only bunch of flowers she had received during the cotillon.

Dick Willing fairly outdid himself that evening; he led with a dash that inspired emulation in his followers. Mrs. Silas Smith was beaming with happiness. Phoebe Smith, radiant with smiles—Senator Smith —the fact was that Senator Smith disappeared upstairs shortly after supper with a few cronies, and was not seen again. Someone passing a door somewhere heard something that sounded suspiciously like the rattling of round pieces of ivory; but it was only a suspicion as the door was locked.

Dick Willing had the good sense to stop the cotillon before the dancers were weary. There were loud cries for more, and in re-

sponse the Marine band struck up a lively two-step. Violet danced with Maitland. It was no longer the dreamy waltz but the wild abandon of rapid movement. Fairly intoxicated with excitement she glided over the shining floor, her heart beating with wild, delightful pleasure. On, on they danced, until she reeled with dizziness. The music stopped. Maitland led her quickly out of the ball-room to a nook under the musicians' gallery. Breathless from the dance, she sank among the cushions of a divan. Her cheeks glowed from the exercise; her dark eyes glistened in the subdued light. A Russian belt from the Caucasus, a favor in the last figure, lay carelessly in her lap. She half closed her eyes and smiled in a dreamy way. Maitland seized a flower from his buttonhole and dropping on one knee before her said: "This rose, sacred to Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, I lay at her feet in the hope that she will grant me her magic girdle and thereby render me invincible in love."

Violet took the belt from her lap and drew it over his head. Laughing, she said: "The girdle is thine, oh, mortal,

but thy invincible charms are to be invisible."

"To all but the goddess who gave them, I trust," said Maitland, rising from his knee. "It was to win favor in her eyes that I asked the boon." He smiled mysteriously, but there was a cold ring to his words. His eyes were almost tender.

"The way to win my favor," she said, "is to teach me not to mistrust you."

VI

"THINE OWN TRUE KNIGHT."
Merry Wives of Windsor, II. 2.

"You ought to have been a knight-errant, Jack; you ought to have been born in the Middle Ages when you could have ridden through the world on a charger, righting the wrongs of lovesick maidens, and fighting everybody who did n't agree with you."

Violet was the speaker. She and Jack Hardy had ridden out to the Hunt Club. It was a crisp winter afternoon, and they were warming themselves before a log fire. Twilight had come and the firelight flickered on their faces; in the shadow beyond, huge rafters and walls hung with sporting prints and trophies of the chase were dimly outlined.

Jack tapped his boot thoughtfully with his riding crop.

"I do n't think you have ever understood me," he said finally; "I am not a visionary."

"Then why are you continually preaching?" she answered impatiently.

"I am nothing but a soldier, Violet. I am used to activity; I can 't get accustomed to the life here, that is all."

"Nonsense, Jack, it is a soldier's business to adapt himself to circumstances. It would be far better for you if you had never seen the frontier, and the sooner you forget it the better. Make the most of your opportunities."

"I must be a very disagreeable person," he said resentfully.

"No, I scold for your own good. You have been acting like a big baby lately; why, at the ball the other night you were as peevish as a spoiled child. Simply because Mr. Maitland sat down at our table you took it upon yourself to be as disagreeable as possible. If he had been anything but a man of the world my position would have been unbearable."

Hardy moved in his chair restlessly. Many thoughts were passing through his mind. He turned and looked at Violet. There had been real indignation in her voice; there was a flash of resentment,

almost of anger in her dark eyes. He knew that he was drifting, drifting always away from her; soon she would leave his life for ever. He laughed at the thought. Why struggle against hope? Each succeeding day bore him further from Violet. He knew it, and he was powerless to prevent. He loved with a mighty love, a love so overpowering that the very thought of expressing it in words drove him to despair. He wondered how other men who had won the hearts of women had acted. But other men had never loved as he loved.

"I did n't mean to be so cross to you," said Violet, looking up and meeting his distressed glance; "but I am very fond of you, Jack, and it pains me to see you becoming so moody."

"Very fond," he cried; "if you only knew how those words hurt me."

"Why, Jack, what do you mean?"

"It 's all over, Violet," he said despondently; "it 's all over. I knew it could not last."

"Why, what is the matter?"

Hardy stood before the fire. His riding crop was clinched tightly in his hands. His

eyes glared vacantly, and his words seemed spoken to some one else, some one at a distance. "You have been kind to me, Violet," he said, "very kind. I am grateful for your friendship; I am grateful for the few years I have known you. When I am gone I shall—"

"When you are gone, Jack?" cried Violet.

"Yes, Violet, I am going back to the frontier. You remember you told me a one-company post was the place for me."

"But, Jack, I was not in earnest. I was only joking."

Her eyes met his eyes. She knew then what before she had only suspected. She turned away; she could not bear to look into his pale, desperate face.

"Shall I go, Violet?" he said. "You know why I am going."

"Yes, Jack, I know. Perhaps it is for the best."

He gazed into the fire silently. He wondered why he had feared to learn the truth. Now that it was over he felt braver. He turned suddenly and looked at Violet. There were tears in her eyes.

"Do n't, Violet," he said almost cheerfully. "Do n't mind me, it is a soldier's business to adapt himself to circumstances. I shall be all right. Believe me I shall."

Violet seized his hand and held it tightly against her heart with both her own. "Forgive me, Jack," she cried impulsively; "I have tried to care for you. I do care for you, more than for any man, but not as you would wish me to care. You understand, do n't you, Jack?"

Hardy smiled hopelessly. "Yes, Violet, I understand."

"And you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive. I am very grateful because you have let me be your friend so long."

Violet wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Forget me, Jack," she said; "think of me as I really am. You do n't know what a vain, selfish thing I am."

She tried to smile but her eyes met his again.

"I am not worthy of you, Jack, believe me I am not," she said. "Promise me you will forget me."

He turned away from her and gazed into

the fire. "I cannot make a promise I could not keep," he answered slowly. "I shall love you always. Shall we go now? It is getting late," he said, after a moment.

Violet left her seat before the fire. Hardy picked up a glove she had let fall and handed it to her.

"Jack," she said, taking his hand; "please do not go away. Can 't we be the same old friends we have always been?"

"It is better that I should go. Besides I should be only a friend. There might be some one else—" he hesitated a moment. "Is there some one else, Violet? I should like to know."

"No, Jack, there is no one else." There was a thought in her mind which troubled her, but it was merely a thought. It vanished as it came.

"I am thankful for that, Violet. I have had a fear lately, a foolish fear. I wanted the man you loved to be worthy of you; that was all."

Violet stopped suddenly. She turned toward him and looked him full in the face. "I wish I could love you," she said, "love you as you deserve to be loved."

"Love begins with love," he said bitterly.

Violet smiled. "You see the truth of my words, do n't you, Jack? Try and believe, too, that friendship is more durable than love."

Hardy laughed. "As well tell a man with a copper cent that it is more durable than a gold dollar."

"Come, Jack, be sensible; we can be the same old friends."

"Friends, yes," he said thoughtfully, "but never the same old friends. Your friendship will be pity now, and mine—well to call it friendship is merely begging the question."

The dying firelight flickered. A mournful gust from the night outside swept over the glowing embers. Slowly they walked toward the door.

Violet stopped on the threshold, and turning toward him, said: "Perhaps I am not like other women, Jack. I am colder, more unimpressionable. I think I care for you more than I care for any man, more than I have ever cared. I will marry you if you wish."

He kissed her, then for a moment he held her in his arms and looked into her eyes. "I love you with my whole soul," he cried; "I would die for you, but I could not marry you, Violet—not when you look at me like that."

"Perhaps it is better that you should go, Jack," she said thoughtfully; "better for you at least."

He did not reply. He was trying to realise the change which had come over his life.

VII

"EPICUREAN COOKS SHARPEN WITH CLOYLESS SAUCE HIS APPETITE."
Antony and Cleopatra, II. 1.

Mrs. Rivers' cook was unable to fulfill expectations. Komlossy had gone so far as to pronounce her divine, but she proved her fallibility when it came to the chicken soufflé. It was soggy. The consequence was that the little Magyar remained ill-humored for the remainder of the evening. Besides he was next his hostess, and could not express his indignation. Ill fortune is proverbially gregarious, and on this occasion his other neighbor was Mrs. "Senator" Smith. No diplomat, however skilled, could retain his serenity under such circumstances.

Since the success of her dance Mrs. Smith had grown garrulous. Her social footing was more secure, and having tasted the sweets of triumph, she felt an exultation it was impossible to restrain. With true

maternal pride her laudation took the form of Phoebe.

"Phoebe ought to make a brilliant marriage, do n't you think so, Mr. Minister?" she said to the Hungarian, giving at the same time a glance of pride across the table toward her daughter, who was sitting between Count Joam de Albuquerque and Ritchie Maitland.

Komlossy, noticing that both men were earnestly talking in the other direction, merely gave an assenting grunt.

"You must admit that Phoebe has every advantage," she continued. "Social position, wealth, and, if I do say it, she is above the average in looks."

"You have stated the case mildly, Mrs. Smith. I should say she had every advantage."

"I am glad you agree with me. I am thinking seriously of taking Phoebe abroad in the spring."

"Indeed, Mrs. Smith. Is her health poor?" said the little man with a show of surprise.

"No," replied Mrs. Smith emphatically; "but the advantages of Washington are so

limited, society is so restricted, a girl has no opportunities. There are no marrying men here."

"I could name a dozen who would jump at the chance of marrying such a—such a prominent girl as your daughter."

"Of course Phoebe could marry any one in Washington," said Mrs. Smith, proudly, "but what are the men here? merely impecunious officers and department clerks."

"There are a few stray diplomats, Mrs. Smith, Albuquerque for instance."

Mrs. Smith looked at the minister resentfully. "Nonsense, Albuquerque is only half-witted."

"A commendable quality in a husband."

"Now really, Mr. Minister, be serious. I should like your advice, you are a man of so much experience—whom would you suggest?"

Komlossy was vexed. What had he to do with choosing a husband for Phoebe Smith? She might marry a cab-driver for all he cared—the mouse-like, little upstart. He glanced across the table, a tall footman was standing behind Maitland's chair. He

was on the point of suggesting the footman, but he restrained himself.

"Why need you seek further than Ritchie Maitland," he said with an inward chuckle, "he is handsome, cultivated, a man of the world, in every sense a desirable parti. He is poor to be sure, but his social standing is unexcelled, and he has had experience of the world which should prove invaluable in a husband. Why do n't you have Miss Phoebe set her cap for him?"

Mrs. Smith cast a longing glance at Maitland.

"She would have a rival to be sure in Violet Duncan," continued Komlossy, "but your daughter has every advantage of wealth, social position, and I might safely add—beauty."

Mrs. Rivers had made the sign to leave the table.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Smith hurriedly; "I feel that you have been a real friend. Won't you come and see me soon; we might have another delightful talk?"

Komlossy bowed perfunctorily, then offering his arm to the hostess he walked out of the dining-room, thinking inwardly

that there is no fool like a silly old woman. In the drawing-room he found himself near Mrs. Cortland. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"I see that cowboy soldier has got up to the speaking point and has been refused," Komlossy said to Mrs. Cortland with a slight accent of triumph.

"How do you know?"

"He has gone to join his regiment."

"That proves nothing."

"My dear Mrs. Cortland, I have private information from the war department that Lieutenant Hardy joined his regiment at his own request."

"He is a thorough soldier," said Mrs. Cortland vaguely; "the life here is too lazy for him."

"Bah," said Komlossy, "no soldier ever left Washington at his own request unless there was a woman at the bottom of it."

"If there were no women in the world you men would have no excuse for your evil deeds."

"We would have no evil deeds to excuse."

Mrs. Cortland directed her eye-glass at the minister.

"You must have been disappointed in your dinner, Komlossy."

"Yes, the soufflé was soggy. If there is one test of a good cook it is a soufflé, and to think that only last week I was upholding the cook of this establishment as a veritable cordon bleu."

"Run away, Komlossy, and have your smoke; you will be less disagreeable then," said Mrs. Cortland, turning her back on him.

The minister shrugged his shoulders. Then he wandered towards the smoking-room.

Mrs. Cortland walked across the room to where Violet was sitting.

"I hear Mr. Hardy has left Washington," she said, taking the seat beside her.

"Yes, he has gone back to his regiment."

"I am sorry to hear that; he was a great favorite of mine."

"He is too quiet in his tastes for Washington; he does not care for society."

"But he is such a manly young fellow, so straightforward and nice. Do you know, I rather hoped you might fall in love with him, Violet."

"I! Mrs. Cortland," said Violet with an expression of astonishment. "Why I have known Jack Hardy always, at least ever since I was a child."

"You must believe in love at first sight."

"I do."

"In most cases I should advise a second sight," said Mrs. Cortland dryly; "a girl can't know a man too well; that is if she intends to marry him."

"But surely, Mrs. Cortland, a girl should love the man she intends to marry."

"Certainly, my dear; but there is a vast difference between a cozy hearth fire and pyrotechnics."

Mrs. Cortland saw a decided expression of animation in Violet's eyes. She turned around. Ritchie Maitland had just entered the room.

"Do you know what I would do if I were you, Violet?"

"What, pray?"

"Throw away all your French novels and read Fenimore Cooper, or Captain Charles King, or something of that sort."

"Do you wish me to stultify my mind?"

"No, but you might cultivate a taste for

nature's noblemen. There is some difference between a blunt, straightforward hero and a Casal for instance."

Violet shuddered. She remembered the day when she had been reading "Un Cœur de Femme," and thinking of Maitland. "A magnetic creature, whose power lay in his boldness, who was selfish even in love." That was her thought then. Had it changed? she wondered.

"Really, Mrs. Cortland," she said, "I must confess that I should prefer a Casal to a Leather Stocking, for a husband at least."

"That is the way with you girls. You judge a man by his accomplishments, not by what he has accomplished."

Maitland wandered towards them. "I thought I would come over here," he said, "and let Mrs. Cortland slang me, she seems to enjoy it so."

"Not so much as you fancy," said Mrs. Cortland, "you are too vulnerable, I prefer to attack an Achilles."

"Whom you can only hit when he is running away. I receive your shafts more boldly than that."

"Mrs. Cortland never says behind your

back what she would not say before you," interrupted Violet.

"I can readily believe that. To my face she tells me I am an all-around scoundrel. I do n't know that she could say anything worse of me."

"I was telling Miss Duncan," said Mrs. Cortland, rising from her chair, "that you were like the conventional hero of a French novel. Sit down here and refute the aspersion—that is if you can, which I very much doubt."

"Do you know, I am beginning to like your friend," said Maitland, glancing after her as she walked away."

"Because she tells you the truth?"

"Do you think she tells the truth about me?" said Maitland quickly.

"She merely tells me what others do, that you are very designing and very selfish."

"And you believe it?" he asked earnestly.

"I neither believe nor disbelieve. How can a girl know much of a man she meets casually in society, until he does something to prove or disprove what is said of him?"

"When a man is reticent because but few people interest him, he is cold and selfish; when he tries to succeed in what he has undertaken he is designing; such is the judgment of the world," Maitland said bitterly.

Violet was thoughtful a moment. "I think reticent people are apt to be either bitter or selfish," she said finally; "but sometimes they are merely indifferent."

"Then you agree with the world?"

"No; as I said before, my belief as regards you is agnostic. I doubt because I do not know."

Maitland leaned towards Violet. "Miss Duncan," he said, "I am indifferent. People bore me. That is most people. But you are different. You are such a thoroughly good fellow; I wish you would be my friend. I hope that is not too abrupt a way of asking."

Violet laughed. "Why did n't you say I was an adorable, heavenly creature?" she asked.

"Because I am very serious. I really wish your friendship."

"I do n't believe much in friendship between men and women," she answered

thoughtfully. "I once had a friend of whom I was very fond, but he ended by falling in love with me."

Maitland smiled. "I could not accept friendship," he said, "if that were prohibited in the contract."

"And I would not grant friendship on any other terms."

"Do n't compel me to throw aside the mask of friendship. It conceals—"

"Your egotism," interrupted Violet. "Men like to make friends. It amuses them to have some one who will confide secrets to them, some one to whom they can tell just as much or just as little as they please."

"Is that the way this other friend did? Because one man is false—"

"The other friend was true as steel." Violet interrupted, "never in my whole life have I doubted him."

"And why do you doubt me?"

"Because you never talk as though you were in earnest."

"Such is the reward of truthfulness," he said with a sigh. "What is there that is underhand about me?"

"No one seems to understand you."

He laughed. "I should not think that would be difficult. I have spent ten years of my life in the government service. Two years ago I was retired. I am fitted for nothing else. There is a vacancy in the diplomatic service. I am here to try my luck. It is very simple, is it not?"

"I am surprised you have never asked me to help you." Violet looked at him quizzically. She was thinking that he would not be the first man to use his attentions to her as a means to obtain political preferment.

"Again you misjudge me," Maitland said humbly. "I confess that when I first met you the thought came to me that your father's influence would be most valuable; but it was only a thought, which vanished when I knew you better."

"I should think that now you know me it would be very easy to ask my assistance. In fact I should be only too pleased to speak to my father."

Maitland met her glance. "Please, Miss Duncan," he said anxiously, "do not speak to your father."

"And why not, if I wish to help you?"

"Because," he replied, lowering his voice, "I wish you to believe in me. I do not wish you to think of me in the light of an office-seeker."

"I thought you wished my friendship. How could I show it better?"

"Miss Duncan," he said earnestly, "I only mentioned my aspiration because you doubted my sincerity. Whether I get the London secretaryship matters little, but the loss of your esteem matters much to me."

Violet smiled. "What has that to do with the loss of my esteem?" she asked.

Maitland looked into her eyes. "You know you could not respect me if my friendship had an ulterior motive. Come, be frank, could you?"

"No, I could not," she said.

"Then promise me you will not refer to this matter again."

"That is accepting the gage of friendship, is it not?"

"It is," he said.

"Then I accept," she answered. "I began to like you at Mrs. Smith's dance. I begin to respect you now."

"I crave even more than that," he said almost tenderly.

"Do n't make me think you a glutton now that I am just beginning to like you."

"Ah, but you began that last week; the next beginning must be—"

"The end," said Violet quickly.

"The end of friendship, yes," he answered rising from his seat to make way for General Lloyd, who had just approached.

"Oh, these diplomats, Miss Duncan," said General Lloyd, glancing at Maitland, "their tongues are well oiled, but they mean nothing. Beware of them."

"But unlike some general's swords their tongues are sharp and they use them," Violet replied.

"Really, Miss Duncan, I protest."

"A general commands, a diplomat merely executes the commands of others. He is only a high private," said Maitland, seizing this opportunity of leaving the general in full possession of the field.

"Private," replied General Lloyd too low to be heard by Maitland. "Spy."

"Why do you dislike Mr. Maitland so?" asked Violet.

"I dislike any one who claims a large share of your society."

"Then you must dislike yourself exceedingly," laughed Violet. "I know of no one to whom I have devoted myself more during the past fortnight. Even now I permit you to interrupt a very interesting conversation with a very interesting man."

"Still thinking of that diplomat. One could understand it if he were still in office," answered General Lloyd, taking the seat vacated by Maitland.

"I am thinking of him because I wish you to think of him. I wish to interest you in his behalf."

"So he has been asking you to help him. I thought that was his game."

"On the contrary he has not asked me," said Violet indignantly. "That is why I wish to help him."

The general frowned. "He made himself very unpopular with Americans in Paris. He was too good for his own countrymen."

"I can quite understand that," said Violet, "judging by the majority of Americans one meets on the continent. He certainly would make a better impression in Europe

than the backwoods politicians we usually send."

"Mr. Maitland is from Delaware. There is a candidate from my own state, a young New Yorker, whose father is prominent in politics. He naturally expects my backing."

"But I wish your support."

"My support; you over-value it," said the General deprecatingly. "All you have to do is to ask your father and the thing is done."

"Not if you oppose it. You know the President is already seeking renomination, and he wishes New York state votes in the convention."

"What a politician you are. You ought not to throw yourself away on secretaries, you ought to marry a leader."

"General Lloyd," said Violet resentfully, "I was not aware that my marriage was the subject under discussion."

"Pardon me," replied the General coldly, "we were talking politics."

"No, appointments."

"That is all there is to politics."

"There are obstructionists, are there not?" asked Violet.

"Yes, and neutrals," the General said suavely. "In this instance I recognize the rights of both belligerents, and declare neutrality."

"Then that is your ultimatum, is it, General?"

"It is."

"Remember I shall hold you to your pledge," said Violet, rising from her seat. "Do not let this young man from New York draw you into the fight."

The General bowed. "You might draw me into the fight yourself if you would."

"Would what."

"Smile upon me a little more favorably."

"Here is an opportunity to give me cause."

"An opportunity for me to pull chestnuts out of the fire," said the General, with a frown.

Violet looked at him resentfully. Then she turned and walked away without replying.

The General glanced after her admiringly.

"What a wife she would make for an ambitious man, General," said Mrs. Cortland at his elbow.

"Mrs. Cortland, an ambitious man should be a bachelor, then he can rise by flirting with the wives of the men in power."

"It is less circuitous to have a wife who flirts with the men in power."

"My wife would flirt with no man," said the General doggedly.

"How would you prevent it?"

"By killing the man."

"Mercy! what a fire-eater."

General Lloyd walked away. He was distinctly annoyed.

"The weather here is like an American woman's temperament."

VIII

"FOR POLICY SITS ABOVE CONSCIENCE."
Timon of Athens, III. 2.

Komlossy stopped on the steps of Mrs. Rivers' house to turn up the collar of his overcoat. A north wind was blowing, and the cold air penetrated to his thinly covered bones.

"The weather here is like an American woman's temperament," he said with a shiver, "bright and fascinating until you discover how cold it is."

"When a woman is cold," said Maitland, "there is some satisfaction in thawing out her heart."

"Umph!" grunted the little diplomat; "and what do you get for your trouble? The privilege of sitting by the fire on rainy days and talking about poetry, or holding her fan while she dances with the latest recruit for her troop of best young men. In Europe a lover is a conqueror who drags a willing captive at his chariot wheels; in

America he is a tame pussy-cat who is allowed to purr at convenient moments. In Europe a woman would die twenty times for the man she loves; in America she might die if she were not loved by twenty men at the same time."

Maitland felt too cold to argue the point, so the two men sauntered along in silence. It was but a step to the club and both had visions of a cosy corner by the fire.

When they had reached that land of their heart's desire and were comfortably toasting their toes on the fender in the smoking-room, Maitland turned to Komlossy and asked him if he really thought American women inferior to their European sisters.

"Not at all, not at all!" expostulated Komlossy. "If I wanted to be amused I should go to Paris; if I wanted to be married I should go to New York."

"A tribute to mediocrity?"

"No, to intelligence. Love a woman with an intellect if you want to be wretched; marry one if you want to be successful. The greatness of many a man is merely the possession of a clever wife. And by the way Maitland, that reminds me that I have

been arranging a marriage for you this evening."

"For me!" exclaimed the younger man.

"Yes, it is quite settled. Mamma is willing."

"Oh, really, then I am not to be consulted."

"No, merely advised. I rely entirely upon your judgment. You cannot fail to see the material advantages of the union I propose."

"I think the negotiations have arrived at a stage when at least the name of the prospective bride should be confided to me," said Maitland.

"Nothing easier," chuckled Komlossy. "Phoebe Smith."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Maitland.

"Leave off the 's' and call it Heaven. What could be better than an heiress to millions?"

"A woman with an intellect, to quote your own words. Marry one if you want to be successful."

"Bah, that is if you have millions already; but a clever pauper like yourself needs money, not brains."

"True."

"Well, think it over. I have made the preliminary arrangements; mamma is willing, even anxious I might say."

"See here, Komlossy, you are making game of me, and I won't have it," said Maitland resentfully.

"That is ingratitude, base ingratitude; you know my selection is a good one—for you at least. As for the girl, I confess it took a great stretch of conscience for me to advise a union with such a thorough rake as you."

"A rake makes the best of husbands, he has had so many opportunities for studying the rôle."

"Exactly. That is why you should marry Phoebe Smith; you have experience, she has money; you will get the money and she the experience—not a bad exchange as the world goes."

Maitland did not reply. He was thinking. Not about Phoebe Smith and her millions, but about other schemes he had in mind. He was thinking about Violet Duncan and the part he was playing.

"That 's right, think it over," said Kom-

lossy rising from his seat. "I am going to play piquet with Brankovan."

Maitland gave an assenting grunt. Then he ordered a drink, and sat gazing into the fire. Yes, he had played his cards well, he thought. The Secretary of State was favorable, at least he had no candidate of his own. The senators from Delaware had both made a personal fight in his behalf, and there was no one from Delaware at present in the service. All that was needed was strong personal influence with the President. General Lloyd was thought by many to be the power behind the throne, but General Lloyd was out of the question; he had taken a distinct dislike to Maitland which he was at no trouble to conceal. In the cabinet the influence of Secretary Duncan was paramount. He had won that influence.

Violet would help him. He smiled when he thought of the diplomatic way in which he had secured her support. He was clever, he thought; he had known just how far to go, and now of her own volition she had enlisted in his cause. Well, it was all in the game. Violet was attractive, he con-

fessed that, but she was too sincere to understand the world thoroughly. If he were in a position to marry he would marry just such a girl as Violet—he would marry Violet. Marry! and not a penny between them. He laughed at the thought. But Violet was not like other women he had known; it seemed cruel to win her confidence, possibly her love, for his own ends. But all is fair in love and war, he thought, and this was a game of war as well as love. When he had received his appointment it would be time to think of such matters—meanwhile, Violet was his strongest card, and to retain that card he was prepared to go even to the extent of making love in earnest. At least it would be in earnest until his appointment was confirmed by the senate—and then—well, sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof.

Ritchie Maitland felt very well satisfied with himself. He sipped his whisky and soda and watched the firelight, then he fell to thinking of his conversation with Komlossy. The little Hungarian was never to be taken seriously—but Phoebe Smith—well a man in his position might do worse,

a man with expensive tastes and an income of only three thousand a year.

"Hello, Maitland! You 're the very chap I 'm looking for."

Maitland glanced up. The speaker was Albert Way, private secretary of the Secretary of State—"Bertie Way" as everybody called him—an old friend of Maitland's who had the faculty of knowing or suspecting everything that the powers above were doing, and thus was invaluable as a partisan.

"Well, what is it, Bertie?" said Maitland, touching the bell by his side, for he knew the circumstances under which Bertie's tongue wagged most freely.

"You 've got to get a move on," replied the state department functionary, dropping between the arms of a leather-covered chair.

"Why, what 's up?" exclaimed Maitland.

"What 's up? Why Lloyd is not only against us but he 's got a candidate of his own."

"The devil you say."

"Yes, Lloyd 's gunning for you."

"But who 's his man?" asked Maitland anxiously.

"Rye and carbonic for me." The servant had appeared; Bertie could conceive of nothing more important than the commanding of his tipple, so Maitland was left in expectancy until the man had departed to execute the order.

"Well, it 's this way. Lloyd is after your scalp, and when he found you had almost a cinch on this London business, he went and trotted out young Bill Whiting, the strongest man he could find."

"What, the son of Bill Whiting, of New York, the man who puts up millions in every campaign?"

"Exactly."

"Why, I thought he and Lloyd were rivals."

"That 's where the fun comes in," chuckled Bertie. "You know the President wants to conciliate the factions in New York, so when General Lloyd comes out for Bill Whiting's son, I do n't believe he 'll dare refuse; it 's too powerful a combination to break."

Maitland drained his glass. "But there must be some way out of it, Bertie."

"There is only one way; get Duncan to take his coat off. There is a chance there at least to hold the thing up until you can rally all your forces. If you do n't, Whiting's name will go to the Senate before you are three days older."

"But what can Duncan do?"

"Why he and my chief are as thick as two peas in a pod. Get Duncan and you 've corralled the Secretary of State. As for the President he never moves without consulting them. The rest of those cabinet chumps are n't in it for a minute."

"I can 't conceive why General Lloyd should have it in for me," said Maitland thoughtfully.

"No more can I unless you have cut him out with some woman. The old boy is a terror after women."

"Mrs. Cortland! No that can 't be, she is down on me, too," mused Maitland.

"Mrs. Cortland—not for one sweet minute," laughed Bertie. "She 's onto the General's curves."

"Well, it 's too deep for me," said Maitland. "But if Duncan is the only chance, Duncan it must be."

"But can you get him?" asked Bertie.

"Yes, Bertie, I can get him," said Maitland thoughtfully.

Then the drinks arrived and for the moment they talked of other matters. Ritchie Maitland had lost his air of confidence.

IX

"Of such a nature is his politic love."
Timon of Athens, III. 3.

Secretary Duncan was at his desk in the library when Violet returned from Mrs. Rivers' dinner. He glanced up from his work as she entered the room. She looked tired he thought; he wished she would take society less seriously.

"Still working, Pater?" said Violet, laying her hand upon his shoulder affectionately.

"Yes, there is a vacancy in the quartermaster's department. There are fifty line officers who wish to take a short road to a captaincy. I am examining the applications."

"Why not make Jack a captain?"

"Jack, why he is a soldier every inch of him. Make him a non-combatant! He went back to his regiment at his own request. I asked him to remain as a favor to me, I even offered him a diplomatic ap-

pointment, but he wanted to be with his regiment. You do n't know Jack Hardy, Violet."

"Yes, Pater, I know him," said Violet thoughtfully. "He is happier with his regiment."

"Now, my little girl, you must run to bed," said the secretary, taking Violet's hand and stroking it, "you look very tired, and I have a lot of work here to get through with."

Violet kissed him. "Good-night," she said. "Do n't work too hard."

She walked toward the door slowly, then turning suddenly, she came back to her father and seated herself on the arm of his chair.

"Pater, dear," she said taking his hand and resting her head upon his shoulder, "I have something I want to talk about, do you mind?"

"No, dear, what is it?"

"I want your assistance for a friend."

"So you are in politics."

She smiled. "Yes, I am in politics for the first time. You know I have never once meddled with your affairs. I have

been asked hundreds of times, but this time I have not been asked. That is why I wish to use my influence; that is if I have any," she added, drawing her arm about his neck.

"Well, out with it, little lobbyist."

"I want you to help Mr. Maitland get appointed Secretary of Embassy in London."

Secretary Duncan hesitated for a moment before replying. "I do n't like that man, Violet," he said finally. "He does n't quite ring true."

"I used to feel the same way, but I had a long talk with him to-night. He was so straightforward and honest that I quite changed my opinion."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said the secretary. "I have only met him twice. What do you want me to do."

"Why the usual thing. See the President and the Secretary of State. The matter is under consideration I believe. The best argument in his favor is his thorough experience. He was eight years secretary in Paris."

"And, therefore, has had his share of patronage. It is time to give some one else

a chance. That is what they will tell me. Besides I do n't like meddling with affairs outside of my department."

"But the Secretary of State is your most intimate friend," she protested, "and the President always consults you."

"All the more reason why I should wait until I am consulted."

"But, listen," said Violet, stroking her father's hair; "I have never asked such a thing before. Please do this for me."

"Well, Violet, just this once," the secretary answered somewhat fretfully. "But you must not trouble me again about your friends. I do n't believe in women meddling with politics. Run along and do n't bother me any more."

"Then you will see the President to-morrow?" said Violet, rising from her seat.

"Yes, to-morrow, right after the cabinet meeting."

"And you will do everything in your power?"

"I never do things by halves."

"Good-night, Pater dear," she said as she kissed him; "I 'm ever so grateful."

The secretary did not reply. He took

up the next application, and in a moment was immersed in his work.

Violet went to her own room. Her surroundings were characteristic of herself, there was nothing obtrusive; everything, even to the most trifling silver object on the dressing-table, was in perfect taste; everything harmonized with the color scheme of delicate pink and white. She had been her own decorator, and for the price of a mere song she had produced dainty effects with chintz and ribbons which gave to the room an air distinctly of its own, or rather of Violet.

There was an old-fashioned chair near the window, a huge affair with bulging arms and back, into which you sat and were lost in comfort. There Violet passed many an hour in dreamland.

When she had laid aside her gown, unloosed her hair, and wrapped herself in the folds of a loose peignoir she went to that chair and drew it toward the light with the intention of reading a few pages from a yellow-covered book Komlossy had recently given her.

But she could not concentrate her

thoughts. The blurred letters dance before her eyes. She threw the book away in disgust.

"Why should I help him?" she said half aloud. "What is Ritchie Maitland to me? A mere acquaintance, a man who makes pretty speeches and impresses me for the moment with the thought that I am the one woman in whom he is interested. He is nothing to me and never can be."

Then she fell to thinking about the Silas Smith ball. That wild dance—the nook under the musicians' gallery—Maitland's words—his eyes, almost tender—the cold ring to his voice—his mysterious smile.

Why did she think about him? she wondered. He was only one of many men. But she knew him better now. He was not the cynical, selfish creature she had thought him. There was a true man underneath it all.

"You know you could not respect me if my friendship had an ulterior motive."

Those words had the true ring. She was glad she had espoused his cause. It had given them an interest in common. He was no longer one of many men. He

was her "friend." She smiled at the word "friend." It made her think of Jack Hardy.

Poor Jack, he was a hero—but Ritchie—yes "Ritchie"—she repeated the word boldly—was a flesh and blood man, no better nor no worse than he pretended to be; a man of experience, who knew how to say the right thing at the right time, a man who amused her, a man whom she liked.

Why should she not like him? People warned her against him, but people were always jealous of every one more attractive than themselves—in Washington especially, where every one had an axe to grind; where every one was a partisan. Ritchie needed a powerful friend. She was glad she had become that friend. If he received his appointment what then? He would go to London. He would pass out of her life? Did she care? She hesitated because she was uncertain of the answer, and that thought frightened her.

Ritchie Maitland called the following afternoon. It was late when he came; the lamps had just been lighted.

Violet had a corner of the drawing-room

which she called her own. There was a palm or two, a gilded screen, a silver table, a window seat, a lamp with a becoming shade, and a *bergère* with a becoming back. It was the nook where she received her intimate friends. She was sitting there when Maitland entered; Komlossy had just gone, and he always put her in a cheerful mood.

"Better late than never, Mr. Maitland," she said, extending her hand, as he approached.

"I came to thank you," he said. "I have just heard that your father has been to see the Secretary of State in my behalf."

"Your bureau of information must be well managed. He could not have gone until this afternoon."

"I have a friend behind the throne, or perhaps under the throne would be more correct," said Maitland, seating himself on the window seat very near Violet. The lamp shone full in her face, his own was partly in shadow.

"Then you can tell me how the fight goes," said Violet.

"None too well; your friend, General

"MAITLAND LEANED TOWARD HER.
'I DARE NOT TELL YOU,' HE SAID."

Lloyd, has a candidate whom he is pushing hard."

"General Lloyd! Why he promised me he would remain neutral."

"So you have spoken to him, too! Really, Miss Duncan, I cannot thank you sufficiently."

"It was merely friendship," said Violet. "You know we are friends now."

"Yes, friends," Maitland said with a sigh.

"That sigh was ungrateful."

"But friendship means so much or so little according to one's point of view."

"To me it means good-fellowship, companionship, mutual interest if you like." Violet hesitated a moment. "No, I think I should call it mutual sympathy, because without sympathy there can be no friendship."

"And I," said Maitland; "why I dare not tell you my view of friendship."

"Is it then so terrible?"

Maitland leaned toward her; her eyes involuntarily met his glance. "I dare not tell you," he said very softly, "because to me it means so much more than what you call

friendship, it means—oh, what is the use," he laughed, "you would not understand."

"Understand what?" she asked almost anxiously.

"That to me you are more than a friend, you are an ideal." He hesitated a moment. Violet turned her eyes away—she picked up a trinket from the silver table and played with it nervously.

"Do n't misunderstand me," he said anxiously. "A man who has knocked about the world as I have done knows many women intimately; he loves a few perhaps in a certain way—others merely amuse him; but always in his imagination is the ideal woman whom he hopes one day to meet, the woman who combines the qualities he admires most. Do n't misunderstand me, I beg of you."

Violet met his eyes again. "It is you who misunderstand me," she said; "you who think yourself such a clever student of women. You do n't know how strong a part ambition plays in me. You do n't know how thoroughly I enjoy power and admiration; if you did you would despise me."

Maitland laughed. "Your very frankness gives the lie to your self-accusation. You do not know yourself. What is ambition? Why the very mainspring of success; what is the love of admiration but the love of appreciation. The woman who does not wish to be admired, if there be such a woman, is one whose soul is deadened by neglect; one who realises her own repulsiveness. Miss Duncan, it is your duty to be ambitious; it is your right to be admired."

"You should have been a lawyer; you are such a clever advocate," said Violet, pushing away the stool on which her foot had rested.

"My cause is you; that is why I speak with such enthusiasm."

"That sounds like one of the pretty speeches you used to make—I thought you had become more serious—now that we are friends."

"I am almost sorry you accepted the gage of friendship. I fear it was wrung from you through pity. It was merely the desire to help me. I do n't wish you to think of me in such a way."

"I like you, Mr. Maitland," said Violet

frankly. "Is that not sufficient excuse for being a friend. I did not like you at first."

"No, you had been warned against me; some kind friend had told you all my bad habits."

"I think you told me more yourself than any one else."

"And you believed all I said."

"No, I merely believed what you did not say," laughed Violet.

"And were I to tell you everything," Maitland said looking into her face, "were I to lay bare my heart and let you see me just as I am, what would you think then, I wonder?"

"I should think that you were honest."

He smiled. "What must be your opinion now," he said.

"Sometimes I think you are frank and sincere, and then you grow mysterious again and act as though there were something you were trying to conceal."

"Yes—there is something I am trying to conceal," he said feelingly. He left his seat and took a few hurried steps on the floor. Then he came toward her quickly.

"Do n't you know," he said, "can 't you

see," he leaned toward her so that his eyes looked into her eyes; "it is you, Violet, you; I care for you more than I thought it possible that I should care for any woman. It is you—forgive me—I can conceal it no longer."

He took her hand and held it. Her pulses throbbed responsively. She turned her head away; she dared not meet his eyes again. She was afraid—afraid of herself—afraid of him.

"Forgive me," he said, "I would not have told you, but you doubted me."

"There is nothing to forgive," she said slowly.

"Then forget. Let us be friends again, the same old friends. I know that I have no right to hope for more."

"How could I forget?" she asked looking up suddenly. He drew her toward him, his arm was about her; with a sudden effort she pushed him away. "No! no!" she cried, "not now, not now."

"Pardon me," he said humbly. "Tell me you will forgive me. Tell me I may come again, just as I used to come; that some day—not now—a long way off per-

haps, some day when you know me better and have learned to trust me—tell me that then I may come again and speak as I have spoken to-day. That is all I ask."

Violet turned her head away. "It all depends upon yourself, Ritchie," she said slowly; "whether I learn to trust you."

He took her hand and kissed it. "Good-bye," he said, "good-bye; I ask no other answer."

Violet gazed at the floor silently. When she looked up he had gone.

The suddenness with which it happened had dazed her; she tried to think but her thoughts were wild and incoherent. She felt still the pressure of his lips upon her hand, the quick beating of her own heart.

"Do I love him?" she cried in bewilderment. "Is this love?"

She had asked herself a question she dared not answer. Think of it as she would there was always a feeling of fear—of mistrust. She was afraid of Ritchie Maitland, afraid of the power he was gaining over her.

Secretary Duncan entered the room. Violet ran toward her father.

"Did you see the President?" she asked anxiously. "What did he say?"

The secretary shook his head. "I am afraid it is too late. They have about decided to appoint a New York man. You see it is a question of politics."

"Pater, you must stop it—you must see the President again."

"But, Violet!" said Secretary Duncan, "you forget my position in the matter."

"I never wanted anything so much in my whole life," said Violet, throwing her arms about his neck. "Ask it as a personal favor to you. The President can't refuse."

"My dear child," said her father, stroking her cheek affectionately; "I will do my best. The President promised me to-day that he would not make the appointment without consulting me further."

"Then you will see him again; you will urge it."

"But I don't understand, child," said the secretary in a puzzled tone. "Why are you so anxious about this appointment; what interest have you in this man?"

"Don't ask me," she cried, "don't ask me—now."

"Why, Violet, how strangely you act. Why, you are crying."

She left him hurriedly and ran to her own room. Throwing herself upon the bed, she buried her face in the pillows. Finally her maid came. It was time for her to dress. She was calmer then, she could think dispassionately of all that had happened, and as she thought a sudden resolve came to her.

"I will do it," she said firmly, "I will put his love to the test."

As she was leaving the house to go to dine at the Hungarian Legation she went to her father's room.

"You need not see the President, Pater, unless you wish to," she said. "If you do, advise him to appoint the New York man. I think it would be better."

Secretary Duncan looked up dumbfounded. "Violet!" he exclaimed.

She did not answer, she had left the room.

X

"'TWAS AT A FEAST."
Cymbeline, V. 2.

The set in which Komlossy moved was known as "Olympus" because certain diplomats were enthroned as gods, and certain women were their slaves and cupbearers. Komlossy played the rôle of Jupiter; when he thundered, his subjects trembled; when he smiled they fawned.

But slights at Olympus were only cast by certain jealous mortals in the form of American youths, who being beyond the pale, envied the gods. Sometimes they beat their breasts with anguish, sometimes they defied the lightning which somehow never seemed to strike their way.

Dinners at the Hungarian Legation were few and far between. The minister entertained for his own edification and not for the settlement of social obligations. His government was rather penurious, and not being provided with an official residence,

Komlossy made the excuse that his little house in Connecticut Avenue was merely a *pied à terre* where he could only invite a few intimates who were willing to take pot luck with him.

Mrs. Herkomer, the wife of the St. Louis millionaire, who had just completed a superb palace in Dupont Circle, Mrs. Love, Mrs. Silas Smith and other disbursers of social munificence had never crossed his threshold, but his name remained at the head of their invitation lists. No wonder he was spoiled. He could do as he pleased, and it pleased him to amuse himself without regard to others.

As a matter of fact, a dinner at the little Connecticut Avenue *pied à terre* was a feast worthy of the gods. As a scene of revelry it suggested a Roman banquet; as a repast it recalled the most savory delicacies of many lands. Komlossy's cuisine was Catholic—or rather French-Catholic—for his cook was a Parisian who had followed him in the various peregrinations of his diplomatic career, picking up, here and there, a dainty receipt to which he always added a dash of Parisian flavor.

The number of guests at one of Komlossy's feasts was limited to ten, the table was laid in a little alcove opening into the drawing-room. It was chosen instead of the regular dining-room, because Komlossy prided himself upon his originality. The room was pentagonal in form, and a broad oriental divan completely encircled it. The table was placed before this divan, and there the guests were seated. The opposite side was left unoccupied, the service being performed from there. The walls were hung with brilliant yellow brocade; yellow roses and leaves of vivid green were heaped upon the table; gilded lamps hung by chains from above, and trailing from the ceiling was a profusion of rare orchids; the odor of incense mingled with the perfume of the roses, and the music of mandolins came softly from behind a latticed screen.

Little Komlossy, presiding in the centre of that circle of intimates, indeed recalled some Lucullus of a by-gone day. On the occasion of the dinner to which Violet had been bidden, he was almost smothered between Mrs. Cortland and Mrs. Jack

Elliott. He had an arm drawn partly about the shoulders of each. Do not be shocked, Komlossy was over fifty, and this was Olympus. The gods were accorded privileges unknown to mortals, especially after the liveried Ganymedes had performed his service.

Madame Petrides, the wife of the Greek Minister, was smoking a Russian cigarette, but Madame Petrides was a foreigner. It would not do to suspect the other women of emulating her example. General Lloyd wore a garland of smilax entwined about his head. It had been placed there by Mrs. Elliott because it was so becoming, and of course Dionysius should have a place among the gods.

Sweet-tongued Apollo, in the form of Maitland, was trilling his lute—a mandolin snatched from a son of Naples in the adjoining room—and singing a song of the cafés chantants, to which Brankovan—sedate, bearded Brankovan—was beating time with a spoon, while Poniaminski, the Polish secretary, was interrupting frequently and insisting that he was a far more skillful vocalist than Maitland.

It was harmless gayety, of the sort that makes life more bearable, at times, but there were two of the guests who did not enter into the spirit of the occasion. Phoebe Smith, invited by Komlossy purely out of deviltry in order that he might chaff Maitland, did not know quite what to make of it all. She felt more or less constrained by the fact that she was not one of that set, and being demure by nature, her chief occupation was staring in wonderment at the proceedings.

Violet, too, was not in a mood for levity. Her thoughts were too serious. She was looking at Maitland and trying to read beneath the surface, trying to know him—trying to understand the promptings of her own heart.

Maitland finished his song.

"Come, Melpomene," said Komlossy, addressing Violet, "cheer up, we want no tragic muse here. Sing, dance, do something."

"If I dance you must play the fiddle," Violet said with an effort to throw aside her sombre mood.

"I 'll play the piano," said Komlossy.

"Capital! Capital!" shouted Mrs. Cortland. "Ladies and gentlemen, the performance is only half over," she continued, rapping on the table with a spoon to command attention. "In the adjoining pavilion Señorita Violeta, the distinguished Spanish *ballerina*, will now dance a *pas seul*. This wonderful feat—I should say her wonderful feet—will be accompanied on the piano by Herr Janos Komlossy, the world renowned Hungarian rhapsody."

"Here! Here!" shouted the guests.

"And immediately following this unique performance," she continued, "Herr Ladislaus van Poniaminski, a genuine tumbler from the Poland Spring, will entertain you with an original rendition of the *danse Polonaise*. The gentlemanly ushers will now pass among you with tickets. Ladies unaccompanied by gentlemen will not be admitted."

When the applause which greeted this effusion had subsided, there was a general movement toward the drawing-room. Violet, blushing and remonstrating, tried to resist the efforts of Mrs. Cortland and Madame Petrides to drag her into the centre

of the room, but it was unavailing, dance she must, or at least make the attempt.

Komlossy had already taken his seat at the piano. "What shall it be, Miss Duncan?" he asked.

"Something Spanish of course—The Sevillana."

Immediately the little man's fingers rolled over the keys.

Violet was disappointed. She had thought to escape through his inability to play the air.

The Spanish music was greeted with applause. Every one looked at Violet. But she was not to be made ridiculous. Quick as a flash she assumed a Spanish attitude. Then in a moment with head thrown back and fingers snapping, she was dancing that characteristic dance of sunny Andalusia, the Sevillana. Her movements were lithe; her steps were perfect. She danced with the true abandon of the South, but graceful and modest withal.

A murmur of surprise—then a burst of applause, greeted her efforts. "Encore! Encore!" they shouted, as she sank breathless on a divan.

"I builded better than I knew," said Mrs. Cortland.

"How charming," said Poniaminski.

"A rival to Carmencita," put in Maitland.

"Where on earth did you learn it?" asked Mrs. Elliott.

"Charity covers a multitude of sins," answered Violet. "I learned it from a Spanish girl in Paris, to dance at a charity bazaar."

"At last I have discovered the utility of a charity bazaar," said General Lloyd.

"Now, it 's your turn, Poniaminski."

"Never, after that performance. I should be hissed off the stage."

"Oh, but you promised," said Mrs. Elliott.

"Yes, you must," added Madame Petrides.

And between them they dragged the unfortunate Pole to the centre of the room. Komlossy struck up the lively Polonaise, Maitland accompanied with his mandolin, and soon Poniaminski was dancing with all the fire and dash of his native land.

The applause which greeted him was

perfunctory, however. Violet had taken the edge off his performance; her dancing had been such a complete surprise.

Soon the party was breaking up into the inevitable little groups of two.

Maitland wandered toward the corner where Phoebe Smith was sitting. Komlossy smiled when he saw the movement; then he persuaded Mrs. Cortland to inspect his collection of Japanese bronzes in a neighboring room. General Lloyd came toward Violet, who for the moment was occupying a divan alone. He took the seat beside her.

"How dare you brave my anger, General?" she said, shaking her head in a threatening manner.

"Your anger! Why your anger?"

"You do not play fair; you have not held to the neutrality you promised."

"You misjudge me," said the General apologetically, "I have done absolutely nothing since our interview."

"I see. Your work had been so well done before that further effort was unnecessary."

The General smiled. "I am a politician,

Miss Duncan. At least that is what the newspapers call me."

"For once the papers speak the truth."

"But I have one redeeming feature. I seek office only for others."

"That is because you know the futility of office-holding."

"Office-holding is an insidious habit," answered the General gravely. "Quite as bad as opium eating. It ruins a man for anything else. There is no particular satisfaction in it, and it seems impossible to cure the desire."

"So you believe in letting your patients gratify themselves to the fullest extent," said Violet. "That is neither a cure nor a preventive."

"I find my patients much less restive in office than out; therefore I believe in gratifying them as far as possible."

Violet thought a moment. "No," she said, shaking her head doubtfully, "I do n't believe in your theory. I think the only cure is to deny the patient the means of gratifying his craving. What would you say if I were to release you from your pledge of neutrality."

"I should say that the ways of women were past finding out."

"Well, I release you," answered Violet, glancing toward Maitland.

"Now I am tempted to go to the President and urge Mr. Maitland's appointment," said the General.

"And why, pray?"

"Because it would get him out of the country. I am jealous of this—this Mr. Maitland," he added, looking into Violet's face.

"Jealous!" she said in a tone of astonishment.

"I fear he stands in the way of a project which is very near my heart."

"Why, General, I thought you disapproved of hearts."

"So I do for women; when I marry again I should like to feel sure that my wife's heart had already been broken."

"To save you the trouble of breaking it yourself?"

"No, I believe it is wise for a woman to get over being in love before she is married, then she will be able to appreciate marriage. She will be able to realise that the intensity

of love is an unnatural state—a disease of the nervous system; while matrimony when entered into judiciously is the only possible road to contentment."

"How cold-blooded," said Violet with a shudder.

"You say that because your heart has not yet been broken. You have yet to discover that men are never angels. When you learn that they are only mortals—and very treacherous mortals at that—you will appreciate my philosophy."

"I hope that day may never come," she replied.

"And I hope it may come very soon," said the General. "When it does come you will realise that success is the only attainable goal in this world, and even that is precarious."

"I am sure you do n't believe your own cynicism," she said looking him full in the face.

"Possibly not," he laughed, "but at my age a man is forced to believe something of the sort. You see, I am too old to have women fall in love with me; therefore I try to keep them from falling in love with

others. That is where my jealousy betrays itself. You remember I said I was jealous."

"Of Mr. Maitland," she interrupted.

"Yes, of Mr. Maitland," he said.

"Then the natural course would be for you to defeat his appointment; would it not?" she answered rather eagerly.

"The natural course would be for me to wonder at your sudden change of front."

"He has offended me, that is all," said Violet, looking away.

"Are you quite sure?" the General asked.

Violet did not reply.

"Pardon me," he said, "I am merely a neutral. Until you give me the right to become a principal I shall remain a neutral."

"What do you wish me to do?" she said looking up suddenly.

"Break your heart," he answered, meeting her eyes.

Violet looked at him in astonishment.

"By the way," he said suddenly changing the tone of his voice, "I suppose you will be at the White House to-morrow night. What a confounded nuisance these

political functions are. Every time I go to the White House I begin to lose faith in republican institutions."

He had changed the subject. Violet considered it a relief. This cold, designing man seemed to read her through and through. She knew she was no match for him, not in her present state of mind, at least. Her faculties seemed dulled—she could not concentrate her thoughts—she was thinking always of Maitland, and wondering what the future would bring forth.

A half hour later, when the party was breaking up, Maitland came toward Violet. Except for a perfunctory greeting upon her arrival, he had not spoken to her the entire evening. His indifference had annoyed her. She found it difficult to understand his attitude.

"I have waited for a moment to speak to you," he said.

"You have certainly waited a long time," she answered coldly.

"I could not talk to you when others were about. It would have been so unsatisfactory—so different from this afternoon."

Violet turned her head away.

"You act strangely, Violet. Has anything happened?" he asked.

"No, nothing has happened," she said. "I was wondering," she hesitated, "I was wondering whether you meant all that you said this afternoon."

"How can you doubt me?" he asked feelingly.

"I think it is myself that I doubt."

"Then I must convert you to my own faith in yourself."

She turned and looked at him.

"Why do you make those speeches?" she asked. "Those speeches which are so prettily turned but mean so little. It is that which makes me mistrust you."

"So you are still doubtful," he said gently. "Why not put me to the test?"

"May I, Ritchie?" she asked.

"You ask my permission?"

"Yes," she said looking him full in the eyes.

"What a strange girl you are," he laughed.

"That is evading the question."

"Well, my Torquemada, start the engines of your inquisition. I am ready."

"Very well then; remember you have placed yourself on trial."

"And remember that you are testing my faith."

"No, Ritchie; I am testing my own faith."

"Very well, as you please," he said with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

This action; the tone of his voice angered her. She turned away abruptly. I am right, she thought, in putting his love to the test.

"General Lloyd, one moment; I want to speak to you," she called suddenly.

The General was just leaving the room; he turned and came toward her. Maitland wandered away discreetly.

"Would you think it very strange," she said, "if I asked a great favor of you?"

The General bowed. "If it is within my power, you have but to command," he answered.

"I wish you to use all your influence on behalf of your New York friend."

"It shall be as you wish," he said coldly.

"And," she continued hesitatingly, "what I have just said shall remain a secret between ourselves."

"It shall be as you command."

"Thank you, General Lloyd," she replied, extending her hand.

The General smiled. "The favor is very slight I assure you," he said. "It will not take much influence on my part. Good-night, Miss Duncan."

"Good-night," she answered hesitatingly. She had already begun to regret her action. It seemed underhand—cowardly. She went toward Maitland. He was standing alone at the farther end of the room. He had been watching her keenly; his plans were maturing beyond his fondest expectations he thought.

"I am going now," she said, extending her hand.

He took her hand and held it.

"Good-night, Violet," he whispered.

She returned the pressure of his hand. She longed to tell him what she had done, and ask his forgiveness before it was too late. Was it pride or was it fear that restrained her? She did not know.

"To-morrow, Ritchie; I shall see you to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow, and every day until you learn to trust me," he said fervently.

When she had gone, Maitland turned and walked toward Phoebe Smith. She was just taking leave of the host. He waited, and then he sauntered with her toward the stairs. "May I come to see you to-morrow, early?" he asked. "I should like so much to help you arrange your posters. You know Cheret was a great friend of mine when I was in Paris. I will tell you all about him."

"Are you quite sure it would not be troubling you, Mr. Maitland?" said Phoebe Smith with one of her sweetest smirks.

"On the contrary it would be a pleasure."

"Then I shall expect you. Shall we say four o'clock."

"That would suit me exactly."

"Good-night, Mr. Maitland. It is so good of you."

When she had gone, he turned and found Komlossy at his elbow.

"Any fool can fall in love," grunted the little Magyar; "it takes a wise man to fall on his feet."

XI

"A CERTAIN CONVOCATION OF POLITIC WORMS."
Hamlet, IV. 3.

Ritchie Maitland crowded through the door of the White House. He had no official standing entitling him to enter with the diplomatic corps, but like others of the social elect he had evaded the scrutiny of the officials. By temporarily attaching himself to the Hungarian Legation he slipped past the door-keeper in the wake of Komlossy, only to find himself in singular contrast to the gorgeousness about him.

In that medley of embroidered coat tails and glittering crosses, silken sashes and gilded rapiers, Maitland felt ill at ease in a plain black coat. His lengthy residence abroad had instilled in him a supreme contempt for Jeffersonian simplicity. As he glanced about at the various envoys of the old world to the new, waiting there for the opportunity to pay respect to the chief magistrate, he blushed for what he called

the boorishness of democracy. To his mind simplicity was penury—the want of ostentation and formality, a lack of dignity and breeding. He scorned his surroundings and longed for the moment when he could cease paying court to politicians and shake the dust of Washington from his feet.

At last his intricate mesh of wires—the labor of months—seemed smoothly laid. He congratulated himself upon the fact that soon he, too, would have official standing —a place at court. He had heard from Bertie Way late the night before that General Lloyd was no longer openly opposing his appointment. He had not heard of Violet's later request, so he felt that he had only to enjoy the fruits of victory.

There was a movement among the assembled diplomats; the dean of the corps had arrived.

A diplomat's precedence, like a woman's virtue, should not be trifled with. So, in spite of the democratic simplicity of the ceremony, there was considerable delay before the ambassadors and envoys, the secretaries and attachés, together with their

wives and daughters were sorted out and arranged in their proper places. Meanwhile phlegmatic Teutons and reticent Britons, swarthy Northmen and saffron-skinned Celestials jostled each other good-naturedly, while impetuous Franks and imperious Spaniards, diminutive Japs and arrogant Slavs chattered in their several tongues and posed resplendent in the costumes of their several lands. There were the flowing robes of Oriental envoys, the gilded epaulets and clanking side arms of Occidental attachés, mingling with the diplomatic dresses of many courts, some modest and simple like those of England, others of feudal splendor, glittering with jeweled crosses, sashed with the cordons of chivalric orders—the gorgeous liveries of imperial masters.

And all this old-world splendor was to honor the chief citizen of a republic, a simple, open-hearted man who had risen step by step from the soil, a farmer's son, who at the call of the nation had gone forth to battle for the right; a soldier, who, when the war was ended, returned to civil life without fortune or prospect; a man whose

only future lay in his indomitable will, his unerring sense of duty to be done.

Yet there were those like Maitland there —Americans all—who scorned this man because he was unpolished—because he was of the soil. There was Maitland, too, who wished to represent his country abroad because he did not care to live at home; because he hated the simplicity of a democracy and longed for the pomp and splendor of a court.

The imposing array of diplomats passed before the President. Maitland and the social elect followed. In marked contrast to the gorgeous ambassadors and envoys was the tall figure of the chief magistrate attired in simple evening clothes without cordon or cross, without fuss or ostentation. His keen, searching eyes were indicative of the man's power, his clean shaven lip and bearded chin, his thin features and high cheek bones were typical of his race—the Puritan. He had a warm shake of the hand and a word of welcome for every comer.

Maitland knew when he took the President's hand and met his keen glance that

he was being scrutinized; he felt uncomfortable and was glad to pass on down the line of fluttering petticoats beyond. Violet was there with the "ladies of the cabinet." There was but a moment for a glance of recognition, a pressure of the hand, but in that glance he read more than he had been intended to read.

He was crowded on by the throng which had been waiting at the main entrance. He had intended to step behind the line where many of his friends already were, but for the moment the crush had been too great and he was borne on with the stream of humanity already filling every crevice of the White House.

It was a reception by invitation to the diplomatic corps, but all sorts and conditions of officialdom were in attendance, with their wives and daughters in preponderance.

With an amused sneer Maitland gazed about him. Lanky congressmen from lonely districts were there, awkward and uncomfortable in ill-fitting "swallow tails" of shining broadcloth, while their scraggy little wives bobbed and fidgeted and fairly

oozed importance. Senators and members of renown, men whose names were constantly before the public, wandered among the crowd receiving the greetings of their admirers with an air of conscious greatness, while visiting constituents were craning their necks and endeavoring not to miss a sight of the exalted. Veterans of the late unpleasantness, grizzled generals and admirals, were assembled in force, their bulging forms straining the gilded buttons of uniforms but seldom worn, their breasts weighted with badges of various corps, and the insignia of patriotic societies. We Americans are almost childish in our love of distinctive trinkets with which to array ourselves—so the retired veterans were not alone in this display. Many a civilian coat was plastered over with ribbons and baubles, meaningless except to the wearers, but as proudly worn as if bestowed by a grateful nation for bravery on the field of battle or research in the realms of science. There were officers of the army and navy, too, sturdy and erect, in simple uniforms of blue; there were women in low-necked gowns with diamonds galore; there were

women in high-necked gowns and mitts; and mingling with them all were disdainful diplomats, who having passed in review, were making the best of a disagreeable duty, and trying to pick out intimate friends from the motley throng. Through a neighboring door came the strains of music, and in the distance were the glinting uniforms of the Marine Band.

Maitland reviewed it all and smiled. This is democracy, he thought.

"You do n't approve, do you, Mr. Maitland?" said Mrs. Cortland at his elbow.

"Why, Mrs. Cortland, are you here?" answered Maitland in surprise.

"Why should I not be here? If I were in Berlin or Rome I should go to court if I were permitted."

"Ah, but that is different; the rabble does not go to court."

"So you call this a rabble—the men who govern your country, the men who have fought to preserve it?"

"But look at the clothes they wear, look at the guys those women make of themselves."

"Mr. Maitland I have you in my power.

That one remark, repeated to the President—"

"But Mrs. Cortland would not repeat a remark spoken to her in confidence," said Maitland nervously.

"Fortunately for you," answered Mrs. Cortland, "it was I who caught you napping, not some one else. But honestly, do you think that feeling as you do, you ought to aspire to represent this country?"

"Possibly not," he answered sarcastically. "They should send some rampant Westerner in my place; one who would trample contemptuously upon the traditions of the old world, and flaunt his Americanism before the effete monarchs of Europe."

"It seems to me it must be possible to find a mean between the extremes of snob and boor," said Mrs. Cortland quietly.

Maitland glared at her angrily.

"Do n't get angry," she laughed, "you brought it on yourself. You attacked and I defended. I happen to be proud of my country, you know."

She turned away and left him.

"Damn the woman," he muttered under

his breath, "I did express my feelings unguardedly. Fortunately she is not spiteful, whatever else she may be."

He wandered through the crowd. Phoebe Smith was partly filling a huge arm-chair under the shade of a protecting palm. Maitland stopped to speak to her.

"I knew I should find her if I looked long enough," he said.

"Who?" asked Phoebe.

"The prettiest girl in the room. Can you deny the allegation, Miss Smith?"

"Do n't be absurd, Mr. Maitland," said Phoebe, blushing and trying to look unconscious.

"Homage may be fanatical but it is never absurd. Besides what is the use of being beautiful if you are not aware of it?"

"Perhaps I am aware of it," she said naïvely.

"Oh no, you are not," protested Maitland, "your greatest charm is modesty. I hate girls who are self-assertive, girls who enter a room with an air which says—'I am here; I am beautiful; now admire me.'"

"Why, who does that, Mr. Maitland?"

"I could not be so indiscreet as to tell, Miss Smith."

"But you might look about you until you see a girl who acts as though she thought she was beautiful."

"I could not do that. I admire you too much to turn my eyes in any other direction."

"There you go again," blushed Phoebe, "what shall I do to you?"

"You might tell me where you got that lovely gown."

"Do you like it? I 'm so glad," she said, looking up into his face with a pleased smile.

"Yes, it suits you exactly. There is n't one girl in a hundred who knows how to dress. Now that combination of color, Nile green and saffron, it is quite original. And the way it is made, too, that sash across the shoulder, those roses just in the right place, and the simple accordion-plaited skirt; nothing could be more charming."

"What a lot you know about clothes, Mr. Maitland," said Phoebe admiringly.

"Yes, I have often thought of setting up as a rival to Worth and Doucet."

"Why do n't you? I will come to you for all my dresses."

"That is indeed an inducement. But, joking aside, a girl who does not dress well does n't do anything else well. Now, look at yourself for instance. It must be a satisfaction to feel that you have on the prettiest dress in the room, and that people are looking at you and talking about you."

"Are n't you taking a great deal for granted, Mr. Maitland? I do n't believe a soul is looking at me."

"I am looking at you, Miss Smith, but perhaps you would not care to count so humble a person among your admirers."

"I believe you 're making fun of me," said Phoebe peevishly.

"I, Miss Smith? On the contrary I am serious. Really, I dare not tell you how serious I am."

She looked up into his eyes.

"You ought to be more charitable than to look at me like that," he said softly. "It is cruel."

Phoebe blushed, and turned her eyes away.

"You are such a funny man," she said.

"Here 's Phoebe now," said a voice at his elbow. It was the Honorable Silas Smith. Mrs. Smith was with him.

"We 've been looking everywhere for you, Phoebe," said Mrs. Smith, "your father wants to go home."

"Oh not yet, mamma! I 'm having such a nice time," protested Phoebe.

"Your daughter has been very kind to me, Mrs. Smith," said Maitland. "I came here expecting to be bored, and I do n't know when I have been so entertained.'

"Are you coming or not?" asked the Senator petulantly.

"Do n't be so impatient, dear," answered his wife, "of course we are coming. Good-night, Mr. Maitland," she added, turning toward Ritchie. "I wonder if you could be persuaded to take a quiet family dinner with us to-morrow—we might go to the theatre afterward, but of course you have an engagement, you are so popular."

"You embarrass me, Mrs. Smith, for I have no engagement. If I may, I should be delighted to come."

"Then shall we say seven, so we shall have plenty of time to get to the play?"

"Thank you," he said, taking her proffered hand.

"Good-night, Mr. Maitland," chirped Phoebe.

"Good-night, Miss Smith; remember I am terribly in earnest," he whispered as he pressed her little hand.

"Mr. Maitland has been so amusing, mamma," Phoebe said as she struggled through the crowd. "I think he 's just lovely. I like him so much."

"Yes, he is such a gentleman," said her mother. "He has such charming manners."

Maitland watched Phoebe's disappearing form until it was lost in the crowd. She might not be so bad, he thought, if she only knew how to dress, and was n't such a gullible little fool.

General Lloyd passed him. "How are you, Maitland?" he said with a nod and a smile. "Terrible crush, is n't it?"

Maitland was suspicious of this sudden change of manner—could Violet have accomplished that, too, he wondered. He stopped to talk with the Junior Senator from his state. Maitland had the gift of

reverence. He knew how to make the exalted talk about themselves, and how to betray appreciative interest. He was a good listener and he never failed to bestow well-tempered praise at the moments when praise was expected. He never expressed his own opinions in the presence of the great, so he had won the good opinion of many a statesman in whom vanity outbalanced perspicacity.

"I tell you, Maitland," said the Senator, "the President will not make the London appointment without consulting me. He has as good as promised the place to me and you 're as good as in it."

"Indeed, sir," said Maitland humbly, "if I receive the appointment I shall owe it entirely to you. You know I am on the outside and I hear what is going on. It is common gossip that you are closer to the President's ear than any man in the Senate. Without your help—"

"There, there, my dear boy, it 's all right, I tell you. I like you; you 're a good fellow and I like to help you."

"I was very much interested, Senator," said Maitland, "reading this morning an

account of the bill for the encouragement and development of the American draft horse, you have just introduced. It seems to me that such a bill, should it pass, would revolutionize the horse-breeding industry. It has long been needed."

"You 're right, sir, it will," replied the Senator with an emphasis calculated to accentuate his senatorial dignity. "Do you know that under existing conditions the domestic breeder has no chance whatever of competing with his European rival. Unless we place a bounty on draft horses such a thing as an American-bred Percheron will be unknown in ten years. It 's a shame, a disgrace," and so the Senator rambled on for fully fifteen minutes, much to the annoyment of Maitland, who had no more interest in American draft-horses than he had in domestic flies, but he never failed to inject a remark of appreciation or wonderment whenever the Senator paused at the end of an impressive sentence.

When they parted the Junior Senator from Delaware grasped Maitland warmly by the hand and said: "I 'll see the President to-morrow. This New York fellow changes

the situation. There is a fight on, but we 'll win, my boy; we 'll win. I have made it a personal matter, depend on me."

Maitland expressed well worded and well modulated gratitude; then as the Senator walked away he turned and glanced about him searching the faces of the crowd for some one else whom a judicious word or two might turn to his advantage. He could not help thinking again of his talk with Mrs. Cortland, and the fool he had made of himself by betraying his own feelings.

"Hello! Ritchie," said a voice of nasal harshness at his elbow. "I 've been looking everywhere for you; was just going to get out a drag-net and a search warrant."

"Hello! Bertie, what 's up?" answered Maitland anxiously. "You look worried."

"It 's too bad, old fellow, but the game 's up," said Bertie, pressing Maitland's hand feelingly.

"What! Why it can't be!" exclaimed Maitland.

"But it is, my dear boy. Politics is wondrous peculiar."

"But you said Lloyd had withdrawn his opposition."

"So he did."

"And Duncan had urged my appointment."

"So he did."

"And the Secretary told you himself he would make no appointment until next week."

"So he did."

"Then why is the game up?"

"Because the papers were made out today with Billy Whiting's name on them, and they go to the Senate in the morning."

"The devil!" exclaimed Maitland. "I can't understand it."

"No more can I," said Bertie philosophically. "But some one has seen the President since last night. Some one has induced him to act quickly. Who is that some one?"

"General Lloyd," said Maitland confidently.

"How do you know."

"By the way he smiled at me tonight."

"Well, I admit the General is pretty slick. But, whoever it is, the jig is up; there is nothing for you to do but lie low and lay for something else. London is n't the only job in the world."

"Never mind, Bertie, you stood by me," Maitland said, shaking Bertie's hand warmly. "I shall not forget that. As you say, politics 'is wondrous peculiar'."

"And you 're too old a cat to cry over spilled milk," answered Bertie in a cheering tone. "Let 's go to the club and have a drink."

Maitland followed Bertie through the crowd. If he had been less politic, less a man of the world, he would have betrayed his disappointment more keenly. His fondest hopes were shattered; his deep laid schemes, the work of months, had come to naught; but he bowed and smiled at his friends as he passed, and even stopped to pay a compliment, or to exchange light shafts of badinage with such women as Mrs. Love and Mrs. Elliott. At one moment he hesitated. He was on the point of appealing to Violet with the hope that there was

yet time to keep his rival's name from going before the Senate, but he pressed his lips together firmly and followed Bertie Way. It was not his nature to appeal to a woman; to plead for help.

XII

"I DO NOT KNOW WHAT WITCHCRAFT'S IN HIM."
Coriolanus, IV. 7.

Maitland's coldness at the White House annoyed Violet. She had looked forward to meeting him after her duties were finished, but he had gone home without a word of apology or regret. It was not like Ritchie, she thought. He had never since the first hour of their acquaintance left without saying good-night. She went home disappointed. Count Joam de Albuquerque, with old-world punctiliousness, placed her in her carriage, and she forgot to thank him—an unpardonable breach for one so thoughtful as Violet. It was but a step across the square to her house, but during the momentary drive she tried to explain Ritchie's conduct. It was only yesterday that he had told her of his love. Yet, at Komlossy's dinner and at the White House he had avoided her. What did it mean? He could not know

that she had opposed his appointment; there had not been time. She reached the house without having found a satisfactory solution to her quandary.

Her father was in the library, working as usual. He had stolen away from the White House early—to snatch a few more moments for the toils of office. There were few Cabinet officers as conscientious as he; society played a meagre rôle in his career.

"Well, Violet, back already?" he said, glancing up from his desk. "Is n't this early for you? I 've only just come in myself."

"I was tired and bored," Violet answered, stifling a yawn. "I do n't know of anything I hate so much as standing up in line, and shaking hands with a horde of people I never expect to meet again."

"Being in office is not what it is cracked up to be, is it, Violet?"

"No, but it is better than being out of office. At least that was the way I used to feel when I was hoping you would be appointed."

"By the way, speaking of office," said

the Secretary, "your friend Maitland's hopes are blasted. The Secretary of State told me to-night that Whiting's appointment is going to the Senate in the morning, unless I continued my opposition."

Violet was startled. She had not expected this news so soon. "Did you withdraw your opposition?" she asked anxiously.

"I said that, while continuing my support of Maitland, I would not go to the extent of opposing further an appointment which was evidently his wish. It would have been undignified for me to change front completely."

"Yes, Pater, I am glad you did it that way," Violet answered hastily. "Ritchie will never know now," she thought. "General Lloyd will never tell."

Secretary Duncan scrutinized his daughter carefully. "Are you quite sure," he asked after a moment, "that you did not wish Mr. Maitland appointed? You were so anxious at first."

"Yes, I am quite sure," said Violet cheerfully, "and I shall never meddle with appointments again."

"Are you quite sure of that?" he answered with a malicious smile.

"You bad Pater," she said with a reproving frown. "Did I ever ask you to help any one but just this once, and then I changed my mind."

"Next time change your mind before you make me go tramping up to the White House."

"Good-night, cross patch," she answered, with a petulant toss of her head. Then she kissed him and ran hurriedly out of the room.

There were some letters for her on the hall table. One bore the postmark "Fort Riley, Kansas." It was from Jack Hardy. She took it up hurriedly. "Dear old Jack," she exclaimed. "He never forgets me." Without breaking the seal of Hardy's letter, she went to her room. When she had taken off her dress, and made herself comfortable, she settled herself in her favorite chair and opened the letter.

But she did not begin reading immediately. Unfolding the sheets, she smoothed them out carefully on her lap.

Did Ritchie know that she had used her

influence to help his rival? That was the question over which she was pondering. She was ashamed of her conduct, ashamed of having done anything so underhand. She longed to go to him and ask forgiveness. A foolish whim had perhaps ruined his future. What reason had she for doubting him? He had been honest and frank; he had told her that he cared more for her than for any woman in the world. What had she done in return? Acted against him—defeated him. And why? Merely because of her fear that perhaps he loved her for what she could do for him—an unworthy, unjustifiable fear, of which she was heartily ashamed.

She took up Jack's letter and began to read.

It was a simple, straightforward account of his life at Riley—his new duties—the gossip of the garrison—his new friends. Mrs. Simpkins, his captain's wife, had been very kind to him, having enrolled him among the favored young men she called her "children." She was young and very pretty—a superb horsewoman. When she went riding, she was always followed by several of her "children." She hated

Riley, and every post west of the Alleghanies, and she was moving heaven and earth to get a diplomatic appointment for her husband. But she made the mistake of talking about it too much.

Violet pictured this woman to herself—a silly garrison flirt—just the kind to turn the heads of young subalterns, and make a fool of a simple, honest fellow like Jack.

She found herself hating this woman—this Mrs. Simpkins, with her troop of "children." Then she laughed. How foolish! "If she can make Jack forget me, I ought to be very grateful to her." But it is difficult for a woman to forgive the one who supplants her in the affection of even a discarded lover.

Violet continued reading. Riley was active enough, and there was a great deal of work to be done, but it was too civilized; he longed to go campaigning again; he wished there were hostilities somewhere, with real soldiering to be done.

The same old Jack, she thought. Still longing for the impossible; still tilting against the windmills of civilization. If he would only marry some nice girl; some

girl like—she hesitated. No, she did not care to think of Jack as a married man. She was jealous of this possible wife—a dog-in-the-manger sort of jealousy, she thought, utterly absurd and unjustifiable.

She read on until she reached the closing sentence.

"Violet, dear," it ran, "wherever you are, whatever you are doing, I want you to feel that I believe in you—that I worship you. You are the best friend a man ever had and I had no right to expect that you could be more than a friend. Please forgive me for loving you—I could not help it—I know that I shall love you always.

JACK."

Tears came into her eyes. She folded the letter carefully and replaced it in the envelope. She was thinking of the moment when she had said to him, "I am not like other women, I am colder, more unimpressionable. I think I care for you more than I care for any man—more than I have ever cared."

How little a girl knows of her own self, she thought. She saw the desperate, determined look in Jack's eyes when he said,

"I could not marry you, Violet, not when you look at me like that."

He realized that love was something more than mere affection and pity. There had been affection and pity in her heart that day, but there had been no quickening of the pulses at the touch of his lips. She thought of Ritchie Maitland. Did she love him? Did she respect him? She shuddered. "No! No!" she cried, "a thousand times no! I do not love him. I doubt him. I have always doubted him. He fascinates me. He charms me. I love to look into his eyes. I love to hear his voice, but I am afraid of him—afraid of the power he has over me."

She covered her face with her hands and tried to think more clearly. "If I marry that man, I shall be made wretched for life. He does not ring true. I know it as surely as I know anything. Why can't I control myself when I am with him—why can't I think clearly as I do now?"

Violet's thoughts were the analysis of her feelings. She did not love Ritchie Maitland as a woman should love the man she intends to marry. There was always some-

thing which held her back—something which stifled love; it was mistrust. In her calmer thoughts, Ritchie Maitland had never ceased to be the magnetic counterfeit she once thought him—the selfish, designing Casal of Bourget's novel, whose power lay in his boldness, in his gentle, insinuating manner; in those mysterious eyes she could never read. When she was with him, she felt like a helpless bird charmed by a beautiful reptile, who would some day coil about her and crush her. The feeling she had for Jack Hardy was more nearly what love should be, but it lacked the pulse beats. Those were for Ritchie Maitland. When he entered a room she knew it instinctively, though her back was turned; if he did not come to her immediately, she became impatient and preoccupied; she begrudged the moments he spent with others. He exerted a curious power over her, and what was worse, she felt that he realized the strength of his magnetism.

Her sudden resolution to defeat his appointment, and test the sincerity of his affection was a wild, ill-considered attempt to free herself from his influence. She

wished to drag aside the mask, and prove to herself conclusively the character of the man. She forgot for the moment the light in which her action placed her. When she realised that she had voluntarily espoused his cause, and then suddenly used her influence to defeat his appointment, she could not find terms too bitter for the condemnation of her conduct. She was the culprit—the one who had resorted to duplicity—with no more reason than mere suspicion. But should her suspicions prove true, should she demonstrate conclusively, that Ritchie Maitland had found in her the means of securing her father's support? She dared not think how she should feel if that were true—and she dared not change her course, cowardly as it might be, until she had learned the truth.

But Violet was not in love with Ritchie Maitland; she was merely dangerously near the point where, forgetting her fears, forgetting her ideals, she might succumb to the sort of witchcraft which many another woman has mistaken for love, only to realise in after moments that it was merely fascination.

XIII

"ANOTHER EMBASSY."
Merry Wives of Windsor, III. 5.

There was a small cotillon at the Polish embassy the evening following the White House reception. It was not an official crush, for society at large was pacified by the annual embassy ball; on the contrary, the list had been kept small, and in consequence there were many heart-burnings.

Poniaminski was in his element. He was merely the second secretary, but in the case of a social function, he was the autocrat, in whose hands was placed the destiny of Poland. It is true, the dignified ambassador and his dumpy wife received the guests at the head of the stairs, but their duties ceased with that perfunctory ceremony. All else was Poniaminski. Even the fierce-looking chancellor, at whose frown the young attachés trembled, acknowledging his inferiority, was content to strut about with the cross of Saint Stanislas around his

neck, and a string of minor baubles dangling "en brochette," and leave the details of the occasion to the ubiquitous second secretary.

Poniaminski had done everything. He had stationed the gorgeous flunkies at their posts; he had chosen the supper menu, superintended the cooling of the champagne, selected the favors, arranged the flowers, discussed the musical selections with the leader of the band, and directed the waxing of the floor; in fact, he had stepped boldly into the breach, and saved the day for Poland. What sort of a dance would the ambassador and chancellor give if left to themselves? He shuddered at the thought.

Now that every detail was complete, and the elect of Washington were streaming up the stairs between two lines of sombre footmen in gala liveries, Poniaminski found that his duties were but commencing. The ambassador, with increasing age, was losing his memory for faces, and his wife spoke no English and very bad French, so that upon the second secretary devolved the duty of mingling among the guests, and dispersing those little phrases of personal compliment,

so meaningless in themselves but so necessary to the success of an entertainment.

"You look worried, 'Pony,' " said Mrs. Jack Elliott, as the little Pole approached her.

"Worried, Madame. *Je suis demolé.* There is nothing left of me."

"Of course you did it all," said Mrs. Elliott admiringly. "There is no one else in the embassy capable of organizing such a success."

"I have only done what others have refused to do."

"Come, now, confess," laughed Mrs. Elliott. "You have only done what others could not do. Why, the ambassador is an old fossil."

"He is my chief, Madame," said Poniaminski, with an expostulatory gesture.

"And his wife," continued Mrs. Elliott, leaning toward him and whispering. "*Elle est cuisiniere malgré elle.*"

"Ah, Madame," said Poniaminski, raising his hands in horror. "How can you say such things." But the horror was perfunctory; Poniaminski relished the com-

parison; he had no love for the wife of his chief, and Mrs. Elliott knew it.

"Come, confess, you believe it, too," she said.

"Never!" answered the little Pole. "I am going away. I cannot even listen to such treason."

"Then be sure and save me a good seat. I 'm going to dance with Captain Sharp."

"What, after all those calumnies?"

"Certainly. You heard what I said about your chief. I 'll say worse things about you if you do n't give me the best seat in the room."

"In that case it shall be yours, even if the wife of the Secretary of State has to sit on the floor."

With a nod of farewell, he stepped away, and in a moment was pouring polite platitudes into the ear of that helpmate of the State Department, whose dignity he had just grossly offended.

Mrs. Elliott turned away. She did not wish to accentuate the fact that she was left alone, so she walked toward Mrs. Love, who, for the moment, was in the same predicament.

"I came all the way across the room to tell you how much I admire your gown," said Mrs. Elliott.

"You dear thing, I 'm so glad you like it."

"It 's perfectly lovely. Worth, of course."

"No, Paquin."

"Oh, look!" said Mrs. Elliott suddenly, pressing Mrs. Love's hand. "There comes Ritchie Maitland, as unconcerned as though nothing had happened; you know he failed to get his appointment."

"No—did he?"

"Yes. Young Whiting's name went to the Senate to-day."

"Well, I must say I 'm glad of it," said Mrs. Love with emphasis.

"You ought to be sorry for the poor fellow. You know he 's a pauper. What will he do now?"

"Marry Phoebe Smith."

"She would n't have him."

"She might; that girl is foolish enough to do anything."

"Do you know what I think about it?" said Mrs. Elliott, in a confidential whisper.

"I think Violet Duncan is head over heels in love with Ritchie Maitland."

"Nonsense. I do n't believe it."

"Just watch her."

"And he?"

"Does n't care a straw for her or any other woman. He 's too utterly selfish to care for any one but himself."

"Why, I thought you liked him," expostulated Mrs. Love.

"So I do, but that does n't prevent my understanding him, does it?"

But a pretty woman like Mrs. Elliott cannot be left alone for many minutes. Already Count Joam de Albuquerque and a young ensign were approaching from opposite directions. The ensign being the nimbler of the two captured Mrs. Elliott, and the Portuguese was left with no alternative but to speak to Mrs. Love.

Violet was talking with General Lloyd when Maitland entered the room. Her back was toward the door, but instinctively she turned her head. Their eyes met; she nodded, and he returned the greeting rather coldly, she thought.

"I suppose you have heard that your in-

structions have been carried out," said General Lloyd.

"I have heard that Mr. Whiting's name has gone to the Senate, but not that you were responsible for the appointment," said Violet deliberately.

"I always endeavor to have my efforts labeled 'not for publication.' It is wiser, you know."

"Then I have to thank you," she said, with an attempt at appearing indifferent.

"Unless you already regret my action," the General answered, somewhat pointedly.

"Why should I?"

"Because it is a woman's privilege to change her mind."

"Well, I have changed my mind," said Violet suddenly. "I am heartily ashamed of myself for acting as I did. I intend to tell Mr. Maitland that I used my influence against him, and ask him to forgive me."

"Precious little good your death-bed repentance will do after the deed is done," answered the General coldly.

"It will ease my conscience," said Violet.

"My dear Miss Duncan, *ex post facto*

conscience is either the fear of discovery, or a romantic desire for pardon; real conscience is a restraining power, not a regret."

"Then you think I am either a coward or a fool," said Violet indignantly.

"On the contrary. I think you are merely over-sensitive. Let your casuistry be Jesuitical when the subject is a man."

"And you would advise?"

"That you impress Mr. Maitland with the fact that you did everything in your power to secure his appointment."

Violet looked at General Lloyd perplexedly. "Why do you counsel such deceit?" she asked.

"That is where the jesuitry comes in; you will learn to know Mr. Maitland better that way. The end justifies the means."

"The last time I saw you," she answered with a forced laugh, "you wished me to break my heart. Now you wish me to stifle my conscience. What is the next part of me you would like to destroy?"

"Your faith in anything in the shape of man."

"That includes yourself, General."

"I have so much faith in myself," the

General answered humorously, "that I do not need the faith of others."

The conversation had lost its serious tone, and Violet turned it quickly into more frivolous channels. She did not wish him to discuss Ritchie Maitland further.

General Lloyd affected Violet strangely. She felt drawn toward him in a curious manner; she had an intuitive feeling that he understood her; that in some way he was to influence her life. When, a moment later, Dick Willing led her toward the ball-room, she turned and looked at him, and tried to analyze her impressions. His appearance was distinguished—of that there could be no doubt. He had the bearing of the well-bred New Yorker—a mingling of confidence and suavity, emphasized by irreproachable dress, and the manners of esoteric society. His straight, commanding figure and the well brushed white hair and mustache, contrasting strongly with his florid skin, gave him the unmistakable appearance of a military man, though thirty years had passed since he had seen service. But he had a sensuous face, with cruel eyes, and his cold, penetrating personality was

distasteful to Violet; his character, as she understood it, was repulsive.

He was the clever, unscrupulous "boss" of New York politics, who, by repeatedly declining office for himself, and never failing to reward a friend or crush an enemy, had become the idol of party workers and the consternation of would-be rivals. So, in spite of great wealth and social position, he had retained his power beyond the ordinary time allotment of a political career. But his private life was not above reproach; even Violet had heard vague rumors reflecting upon the treatment of his wife. She had died of a broken heart because of his attentions to a well-known actress. It was something of that sort—but such aspersions count for little in the cosmopolitan world, and a man's infidelity means little to a woman unless she be the sufferer.

These were the thoughts that passed through Violet's mind as she wandered toward the ball-room. Soon she was gliding among the throng of dancers, but she found it difficult to pay attention to Dick Willing's prattle. Ritchie Maitland had not yet spoken to her; in spite of General

Lloyd's casuistry, her conscience still troubled her.

After the dance was finished, Maitland came toward her. He spoke to her indifferently, almost coldly, she thought.

"May I have the next dance?" he asked.

"Yes," she faltered turning her eyes away.

"I am very grateful for your help," he said suddenly. "It was useless though; the game is up. New York politics, you know. However, you did the best you could, you were a true friend."

"Friend, Ritchie! Do you know all that I did," she asked in astonishment.

"I know that you induced your father to act in my behalf, and that General Lloyd withdrew his opposition the day before the appointment was made. You could not have done more, could you? but there were stronger influences at work somewhere. It was not to be."

"I did not act as a friend," she said suddenly, looking him full in the face.

He turned his eyes away—"Please do n't talk about it any more," he said. "I am deeply grateful, believe me I am, but it is

not a pleasant topic to me just at present, I want to forget about it. Come, we shall miss this dance."

Violet checked the confession which had been on her lips. She knew better than if she had been told in words that Ritchie Maitland was assuming a new rôle. His manner was not that of an injured man, it was cold and guarded; he was acting on the defensive; he was trying to establish a new kind of intimacy—a sort of distant familiarity. His manner chilled her, there was no thought of confession now. The old mistrust had returned, and anger was the dominant feeling in her heart.

"I 'm getting too old for dancing," said Maitland, as they emerged from a crowd of waltzers.

She did not reply. She was thinking of another time when she had danced with him. She had closed her eyes then as they waltzed to enchanting music, and in the darkness it had seemed that she was being carried dreamily on toward some great danger. Now, she asked herself if that fear had not been realised.

"Why are you so quiet to-night?"

Maitland asked. His voice was almost tender.

"I do n't feel like talking. I have nothing to talk about," she said.

"You might comfort me a little for my failure. You have n't even said you were sorry."

"I thought the subject was painful to you," she answered coldly. "You said so, at least."

He laughed. "Not nearly so painful as to be made to feel that I am so very far from your thoughts."

They had stopped dancing. Violet turned and looked at Maitland. She was on the point of reproving him but she checked herself.

"Did you find Phoebe Smith amusing this afternoon?" she asked.

"Yes, very; but how did you know I was there."

"I happened to see you going up the steps with a flower in your buttonhole, and an anxious look on your face."

"Phoebe is a nice little thing. I went there to ask her to dance the cotillon with

me to-night. The Smiths have gone out of their way to be kind to me lately."

"Are you always kind to the people who are kind to you," she asked.

"Yes, and cruel to those who are cruel to me," he said looking into her eyes.

"How easily you must be led. I thought you were more independent than that."

"I do n't believe in independence," he said; "loyalty is my motto."

"To whom?"

"To those I care for."

"It should not be difficult to be loyal only to yourself."

"How very sarcastic we are to-night," said Maitland with a laugh. "You will force me to a declaration of independence if you are going to treat me like that. How would you like it if I were to transfer my allegiance to Phoebe Smith?"

"I should sympathize with Phoebe Smith," she said bitterly. Then pride got the mastery. She was ashamed of having shown such feeling. "I should sympathize with her," she added, "because I should know that the allegiance was merely tem-

porary—I have too much faith in you to believe that you would desert a friend."

"Now, you are talking like a sensible girl," he said. "I began to think you had forgotten."

"Once a friend always a friend," she answered. Count Joam de Albuquerque came to claim a dance. "Will you come and see me to-morrow?" she said to Maitland, cordially. "I shall be home after five."

"If I may," he answered as she was whirled away in the dizzy, old-world fashion by the Portuguese. He followed her with his eyes. "I might love that girl," he said to himself, "if I only dared, but beggars can 't afford to be choosers in this day and generation."

Then he turned away and walked toward Phoebe Smith, who tried to look unconscious when she saw him coming.

The cotillon was commencing. Poniaminski led with dash and spirit, throwing all the energy of his fiery little self into the work. Soon he had maids and matrons, youths and antediluvians romping about the ball-room like so many children at a

May-day festival. Each figure was original, and there were continuous surprises intended to put people in good humor and make them forget the dignity of officialdom. Women who had not danced for years went tearing about the room as Poniaminski led them through intricate mazes of tulle and ribbons. They had only come as spectators, but when nimble senators of sixty dragged them out on the floor, there was nothing to be done but to enter into the spirit of the occasion. Dick Willing looked on in wonder; he was the recognized leader of cotillons, but the little Pole was showing him a pace that was fairly appalling. It was a romp pure and simple. It is surprising how quickly dignity can be laid aside when the effort is spontaneous. But at the stately Polish embassy such radicalism was startling. The Ambassador and his wife were in dismay; but when they saw the Hungarian minister and a senator on their knees at the same time bobbing for apples, and laughing like schoolboys, they made up their minds that perhaps, after all, Poniaminski knew something about such matters.

Violet forced herself into the spirit of the occasion. She was always on the floor, dancing with all the fervor of which she was capable; favors were showered upon her by the young men and the old; Dick Willing beamed contentedly, for it was always a satisfaction to him to dance with the belle of the ball. Intuition told her more plainly than words that Ritchie Maitland was avoiding her. He favored her in the first figure, and once when he happened to be in her end of the room he took her out; but everything he said was spoken reservedly. He alluded to their friendship, but the word "friendship" was pronounced with cold deliberation.

Violet laughed and chatted with him, and did everything in her power to prevent his suspecting that she read his thoughts. She favored him herself, just to be able to tell him that she had never had such a good time at a dance—and to tease him about Phoebe Smith. She claimed, as a confidential friend, the privilege of knowing how his suit was progressing. Could she help him by speaking a word in his favor to Phoebe? If so, he might command her services.

Maitland accepted this assumed indifference gratefully. He was afraid he had gone so far in his spurious love-making that it would be difficult to retire gracefully. Whatever her feelings were, she had opened the line of retreat so dexterously that he could not help admiring her cleverness.

Violet went to supper with General Lloyd. Mrs. Cortland and Komlossy were at the same table. Near them were Maitland and Phoebe Smith at a little *table à deux*.

"Umph!" said the Hungarian when he had consumed his last oyster. "Having failed as a place hunter, Ritchie Maitland seems to have become a wife hunter."

"He will find the one quite as futile as the other, I fancy," said General Lloyd. "Mrs. Smith aspires to a dukedom at least for Phoebe."

"I can't see why Phoebe should not marry him," said Violet, "can you, Mrs. Cortland?"

Mrs. Cortland looked at Violet keenly; she was trying to discover whether her indifference was assumed.

"No," she answered. "Phoebe has money enough for both."

"He has been quite attentive to her lately," Violet continued. "I have chaffed him about her a great deal."

"I recommended the match some time ago," said Komlossy. "If it comes off I shall claim a ten per cent. commission."

"Why is it that the world finds fault with a man who marries for money?" asked Violet. "For my part, I think the poor should marry the rich, and the rich the poor; it makes a more equitable distribution of wealth."

"That is reducing marriage to a business basis," answered Mrs. Cortland.

"It should have some basis, else what is the use of it?" Violet replied. "Love is so terribly out of fashion nowadays."

"When young girls become cynics," interrupted General Lloyd, "it is time for us old fellows to become saints, if the world is to be saved from absolute perdition. Eh! Komlossy."

"Bah!" grunted the minister. "A saint has a feeble mind, and a cynic a weak digestion. I prefer to take to the woods."

"Before you do that," said Mrs. Cortland, "please tell us why Miss Duncan is

trying to marry her friend Ritchie Maitland to Phoebe Smith. I confess I cannot understand it."

"Because she has become a convert to my belief, is it not, Miss Duncan?" interrupted General Lloyd.

"Yes, to the extent of becoming a Jesuit."

"A Jesuit!" exclaimed Mrs. Cortland. "Explain."

"We Jesuits never explain, we merely dissimulate," answered the General.

"And you, Violet, have you accepted such a creed?" asked Mrs. Cortland.

"I have decided that dissimulation is a means sometimes justified by the end."

"Even that doctrine could not justify the placing of veal in this terrapin," said Komlossy.

"But I suppose it would justify Ritchie Maitland in making love to Phoebe Smith," said Mrs. Cortland eyeing Violet.

"Mr. Maitland is a very dear friend of mine. I wish you would stop attacking him," Violet answered coldly.

"What is the matter with you to-night, Violet?" asked Mrs. Cortland. "You 've

had a chip on your shoulder the entire evening."

"Miss Duncan is a Jesuit by her own confession," said Komlossy. "She is merely dissimulating—in reality she is in the best of moods."

"You have guessed it," laughed Violet. "Now let us all talk about the weather. That is very bad to-night. So I am bound by my creed to take a cheerful view of it."

Criminals and lovers have the common habit of seeking concealment in boldness. They imagine that indifference and bravado will throw the inquisitous off the scent. Maitland's coolness had come so suddenly after his ardent professions of two days before that Violet was stunned as by a sudden blow. She had not time to analyze her own feelings; her one desire was to hide from him and from the world the fact that he was uppermost in her thoughts, but her efforts were so forced that Mrs. Cortland easily suspected the truth. She pitied Violet, but she was hopeful that a greater danger—the danger of being united for life to such a man—had been averted.

General Lloyd, also, with his keenness

"'Now let us talk about the weather.'"

for reading human nature, understood the situation. He had besides been a partial confidant, and an important actor in the events of the last few days. When supper was over he walked with Violet back to the ball-room.

"It is too soon to begin dancing," he said, as they passed through an ante-room where there was a divan and a Moorish lantern burning dimly. "Let us sit here a while."

"Do you remember what I told you at Komlossy's?" he said when they had seated themselves.

"You said that the ways of women were past finding out," she replied.

"Not always. There are times when one can read a woman more clearly than a book; but that was not what I referred to."

"Ah! I remember now," she answered with a laugh. "You said you were jealous of Ritchie Maitland."

"I was jealous of him then, but I fear you will have to guess again."

"I was never good at conundrums."

"Well, I told you," said the General lowering his voice, "that it was wise for a

woman to get over being in love before she is married."

"Do you think I am beginning to fall in love?" asked Violet. "Is that why you proffer this advice?"

General Lloyd looked at Violet. "I think you are beginning to get over being in love," he said slowly.

"Oh, really!" she answered. "I suppose when you consider the process finished you will advise matrimony."

"Exactly!" said the General. "Then you will be able to appreciate the advantages of a judicious marriage."

"Well, I am not in love," exclaimed Violet, "and I do n't know a single man I should be willing to marry."

"I see you are intent upon waiting until your heart is broken."

"I intend waiting until I find the man whom I can love."

"Man proposes and God disposes, only sometimes man does n't propose."

"You are not complimentary, to say the least," she answered indignantly.

"Possibly not, but I am very obliging, especially to a woman I admire devoutly.

So, if you need my help in any of your schemes, you may count upon it. You may wish to be revenged."

Violet looked at him in astonishment. "You are certainly talking enigmas to-night. I do n't understand you."

"You may understand me better before long. A great deal can happen in a few days. Remember you have in me a devoted friend, who will brave fire and water and the President's wrath if you wish it."

"I thank you," she answered. "But I shall not meddle with politics again."

"Never make resolutions; then you will be saved the trouble of breaking them.

"What a cynical person you are," she said looking up suddenly. "Do you not believe in anything?"

"I believe in you."

"In me! How absurd."

"Yes, I suppose it is absurd for an old fellow like me to believe in anything, even a beautiful girl; but one must have some idol, and my idol is you." He said this casually, without the slightest appearance of seriousness.

"Remember, General, idols have stone hearts," laughed Violet.

"In that case, I prefer to consider you a goddess," he answered.

"Most of the goddesses I have read about had very unsavory reputations."

He looked at her intently. "When your own idols are shattered," he answered earnestly, "you may realise that being the goddess of a fanatical old worshiper is not a bad fate."

"The music is commencing," said Violet. "I must go back to my seat."

General Lloyd frowned, but he offered no remonstrance.

XV

"THIS PRIDE OF HERS."
Two Gentlemen of Verona, III. 1.

General Lloyd gave a luncheon at the Arlington Golf Club, a few days after the cotillon at the Polish embassy. He had invited a large party to play foursomes before luncheon, but as is usual on such occasions, some did not arrive on time, while others did not feel like playing; so altogether, the arrangements were considerably upset. However, four matches finally started play over the Arlington downs, while the remainder of the guests broke up into parties of two, to wander about the links or chat in cosy corners at the clubhouse.

Ritchie Maitland had been somewhat responsible for the miscarriage of the arrangements. He and Phoebe Smith were to ride out on wheels, but they had not appeared an hour after the appointed time.

General Lloyd, owing to his military

training, was a man of precise habits. He found it difficult to pardon the tardiness of others, consequently he was much annoyed. He had arranged that Violet and he should play Maitland and Phoebe Smith—in fact, the party had been given with this end in view, so the failure of his little scheme put him in an ill humor he made little attempt to conceal.

Violet and he followed one of the matches for a while. It was a clear March day, but there was a cold wind blowing over the hills which made walking uncomfortable. But the view was superb. At their feet was the brown Potomac, winding seaward, and beyond were the white houses of Georgetown and Washington sprinkled upon the hillside, with the great dome of the Capitol glistening against the blue sky, while scattered over the green links were the various groups of players—their red coats glaring in the sunlight, their golf skirts flapping as they struggled against the wind. But even the surroundings could not make conversation for Violet and her companion. General Lloyd had planned a little piece of strategy which had miscarried, and for the moment

he was unable to conceal his disappointment, while Violet was lost in thought over the events of the past week.

Maitland had called, as he promised, the day following the embassy cotillon, but the interview had been short and unsatisfactory. They had both talked about casual matters, but it was easy for her to discover that her premonitions had been well founded. Ritchie, while scrupulously attentive in all the little amenities, was acting on the defensive. He avoided skillfully all reference to their former relations, and instead of treating her as the woman he most admired, or even as a friend, he had assumed an attitude of casual, almost flippant intimacy. Violet was a girl of spirit. Her pride was deeply touched. She tried to convince herself that Ritchie Maitland was nothing to her. He had amused her during a rather dull winter; he had tried to make use of her, but she had outwitted him—honors were easy. But this explanation was not satisfactory. He had been more to her than any one else. She banished the thought with an effort. Not for one moment would she admit that she had been in

love with Ritchie Maitland. Yet try as she might she could not forget that afternoon when he had told her of his love, and she had almost believed him. She trembled when she thought what might have been the consequences had she been less suspicious, less master of herself.

To be jilted by a man is the most ignoble position in which a girl can be placed. She confessed to herself that it was by the merest chance she had escaped that catastrophe. Ritchie Maitland had played with her affections to gain his own ends. What could be more despicable?

"You do n't seem very talkative to-day," said General Lloyd, after they had trudged together in silence for fully five minutes.

"Is it my fault or yours?" asked Violet. "You have been too cross to speak to."

"Your evident lack of interest was enough to make me cross," he answered rather curtly.

"I was thinking."

"Some new political scheme, I suppose. Have you a friend for the Danish mission? Browning's death makes a fine opening."

"You must n't judge every one by yourself; politics is not the aim of every one's ambition."

"Tut, tut," said the General. "I won't quarrel. Life is too short."

"Who began it?" asked Violet.

"The weather. This wind is enough to put any one in a bad humor. I move we go back to the club and get thawed out."

"If you will promise to amuse me."

"I will propose to you. How will that do?"

"That would be very stupid. A man is so foolish when he is proposing."

"But I will invent a new way," expostulated the General.

"In that case I might listen, but nothing more."

"Not even a word of encouragement? We amateurs need to be encouraged."

"You always talk as though you considered yourself a professional in the art of winning hearts. I am surprised you acknowledge your tyroism."

"One is always a novice at that," answered the General. "Because women's hearts are all different."

"Sort of Yale locks, I suppose. No two keys alike."

And so they talked along about nothing in particular until they reached the club-house. A huge wood fire was burning in the reading-room, and that, combined with a warming drink, succeeded at last in dispelling the blues which had come over both General Lloyd and Violet. But just as they had begun to be comfortable, and the General thought that the opportunity was favorable for directing the conversation into personal channels, word came to him that two ladies had arrived and were asking for him. They proved to be Mrs. Love and Mrs. Elliott, who not being golfers had driven out to join the party at luncheon. He went to meet them, and Violet, left for the moment alone, wandered into the women's locker room, to leave a jacket in her locker. A thin partition separated this apartment from the adjoining room, a small den where two or three people could talk undisturbed.

As Violet opened her locker door, she heard voices distinctly through the partition.

"Why do you doubt me?"

She started. The speaker was Ritchie Maitland.

"I do n't doubt you, but I want to be quite sure." His companion was Phoebe Smith. Violet drew close to the wall. The thought that it was dishonorable to listen never came to her. She was thinking only of Maitland's perfidy.

"I love you, Phoebe. I want you to be my wife. How can you doubt me now?"

Violet's heart sickened.

"But it is all so sudden. How can I be sure? I thought you cared for Violet Duncan."

"How could you think that?"

"You were so attentive to her every one thought you were going to marry her."

"Marry her, Phoebe, when I love you?"

"Do n't, Ritchie, do n't—not now—tell me first if you are quite sure you do n't care for her."

"I never cared for her, dearest; I never cared for her. I was compelled to be attentive to her in a way. I needed her father's help—that was all."

Violet felt as if a sudden dagger-thrust pierced her heart.

"Then you really love me."

"Yes, yes, you, only you; believe me."

"Oh, Ritchie, I am so happy."

Violet could hear no more. She felt that if she stayed she must shout a warning to that poor little creature in the other room. She felt she must denounce that treacherous man to the whole world. She ran quickly out of the house, and across the golf course. She wanted to be alone where she could think clearly and realise it all.

Anger, humiliation, the desire for revenge—these were the feelings which animated her. Ritchie's words merely corroborated her own suspicions; but now that she had heard him declare with his own lips his love for another woman, and deny that he had ever cared for her, all the resentment and passion of her nature were aroused. She hated him with that bitter, rankling hatred which is the result of wounded pride. She longed for some revenge, some means of making him realise his meanness.

When she was out of sight of the clubhouse, and away from every one, she began to cry. The tears were a relief to her pent up feelings. When she finally dried her

eyes, and began to think more calmly, she felt hardened and embittered. Her pride was humiliated; her faith in human nature was shattered. She thought of the world with a feeling of disgust; she had grown older in an hour.

She did not care what happened to her. Only give her the means to crush Ritchie Maitland, that was all she asked. She did not wish to injure him literally, but to make him realise the sort of cur that he was, to make him despise himself, and suffer the remorse that his contemptible conduct ought to inspire. If there were only some way in which she could place him under a great obligation, and at the same time show him her absolute contempt; some way in which she could torture him into a realisation of his own baseness, and make him suffer shame.

She smiled at the thought. Such a man was incapable of shame or remorse. But there must be some way to place him in an unenviable position, some way to punish him. Suddenly an idea came to her. The Danish mission. If she could secure that post for him—a position far beyond his fondest

dreams—if she could make him owe success to her, and at the same time let him know how thoroughly she despised him, that might be a revenge so refined and subtle that even Ritchie Maitland would experience shame.

The idea was pleasing. General Lloyd had suggested it. He would brave fire, water, and the President's wrath for her. His influence and her father's united would be very powerful. She resolved to make the attempt. Had she been calmer, she might have realised that such a man as Ritchie Maitland would merely laugh at the agreeable torture she had planned, and accept it as an unexpected windfall of luck. But Violet was in the state of mind when reason had fled, and pride had taken full possession of her heart.

XV

"ON THE DEBATING A MARRIAGE."
Henry VIII., II. 4.

During luncheon Violet was the life of the party. She chaffed Ritchie openly about his attentions to Phoebe Smith, until the poor girl simpered and blushed to such a degree that every one except Violet pitied her; she flirted with General Lloyd as well, and lost no opportunity of impressing the entire party with the idea that Ritchie Maitland was nothing to her. This gaiety was forced, however; she was thinking only of revenge.

After luncheon she wandered over the golf course with an insipid youth, who made silly speeches and laughed loudly at his own vaporings. Now that those she wished most to deceive were no longer present, her forced gaiety relapsed, and her thoughts wandered far from her companion. Vapid youths demand appreciation, or at least attention, so when, in due time, Gen-

eral Lloyd approached her, the boy fled, with blushing apologies about an engagement which did not exist, and Violet was given the desired opportunity of furthering her plans.

"I was just thinking about you, General Lloyd," she said, as the youth disappeared.

"I am grateful for a place in your thoughts, but I aspire to a place in your heart," the General answered suavely.

"That is easy—the rooms in my heart are all to let, at present."

"Then, I speak for a little back room somewhere, so modest that you will not consider it worth while to turn me out."

"If you wish to become a permanent boarder, you must do something for me—you must help me."

"And if I help you?"

"I shall be very grateful."

"The surest way to make an enemy is to oblige a friend."

"In this particular case you will oblige an enemy," said Violet laughing.

"What have I done to make you an enemy?" he asked.

"I am not speaking for myself. I wish you to do something for someone else."

He looked at her intently. "It is as good as done," he said slowly. "Mr. Maitland will be appointed Minister to Denmark."

Violet started back in surprise. "Are you a wizard?" she exclaimed.

"No, merely a man of the world. It amounts to the same thing when it comes to reading a woman's thoughts. You may remember, I hinted some ago that you might wish to be revenged. There is nothing like putting an enemy under an obligation."

Violet turned her eyes away. The penetration of the man frightened her.

"You misunderstand the matter completely," she said suddenly. "I do not wish an appointment for Mr. Maitland. You must remember that I asked you to oppose him on the last occasion."

General Lloyd laughed. "Your face is too honest for an intriguer."

"I do not wish Mr. Maitland to be appointed," she repeated firmly.

He leaned toward her and spoke very

slowly. "I have the President's promise that I may name the Danish minister. It is a reward for my service in supporting young Whiting, and thus settling the feud in New York."

"It is very generous of the President."

"I am generous also. Would you like to name the candidate? You may do so on one condition."

"And that condition is?" she asked.

"That you become my wife," he answered with scarcely a change in his voice.

Violet looked at him in amazement.

"I am in earnest," he said. "I once told you that I thought it wise for a woman to get over being in love before she married. Marriage is a partnership for mutual benefit; love is a disease."

She shuddered. The thought came to her that perhaps his cold-blooded philosophy was right; at least he made no pretense of a love he did not feel—he was not a hypocrite.

"Why should you wish to marry me?" she asked slowly.

"Because I admire you intensely. Because I feel that as my wife you will be able to assist me in my ambition."

She covered her face with her hands.

"No! No!" she cried. "I could not marry a man I did not love."

"I intend to marry you," he said. "I am not a man who usually fails of his purpose."

"Have you no heart?" she asked. "Can you be serious in this cold-blooded proposition?"

"My dear Miss Duncan, I repeat again that I consider marriage a partnership. Take plenty of time; think over my proposition thoroughly; consult your father if you like, and remember that as my wife you will receive my respect and admiration; you will, I think, become a power socially and politically."

"You are at least frank," she said.

"I am fifty-four years old, but I am not foolish enough to imagine that I could win your love. Your hand is all I aspire to. Here comes Komlossy to talk to you. Think over all I have said. There is no particular hurry. The nomination for Minister to Denmark will not be made until you speak the word."

General Lloyd bowed politely and re-

tired. Violet looked after him intently. Komlossy watched her. Is this the end of everything, she wondered—the end of love?

"If I were you I should marry him," said Komlossy. "He is an excellent parti; millions, position, influence. What more do you want?"

"I want to love the man I marry," she said. Komlossy had asked the question she was putting to herself, and she had answered it unmindful of his presence.

"Love is a disease," grunted the Hungarian.

She turned suddenly, and looked at him reproachfully.

"Why are you men of the world all alike?" she exclaimed. "Why do you all take the same bitter view of life? Why do you all deny the existence of the one thing for which a woman lives?"

"Because we know the world."

"And do you honestly believe there is no such thing as love?"

"Love is the ignis-fatuus—the fire of fools—which hovers over the wilderness of life. We see it, we pursue it—but there it is, always before us, always in the future."

"But surely some attain it," she cried.

"Some seize it breathlessly, only to learn that it was merely the fire called passion; others, and they are the wise, extinguish it, and leave it to smoulder on the hearth, as the comfortable ember of domesticity; but love is always the unattainable—the will-o'-the-wisp."

"I wonder if you are right," she sighed, gazing over the downs, toward Washington, where the rays of the setting sun burnished the dome of the Capitol. She had known two men who had influenced her. Jack Hardy, the valiant unpolished soldier, was one. He would die for love as he would for country. She had failed to love him because he lacked in fascination. Ritchie Maitland was the other; he succeeded where his rival failed; he knew the signs and passwords of a woman's heart. He was an arch player in the game of love. But now that she knew his duplicity, no words could express her contempt; he was a miserable reptile whom she longed to crush—the man of all men whom she hated.

And now another had come into her life,

offering wealth, position, power—all that the heart desires, except the one craving—love. Why seek for more? Why weary herself longer with fruitless chasing after that will-o'-the-wisp? That was the question she asked herself. The temptation was strong. She shuddered at the thought that she might not prove strong enough to resist. Other women had sold themselves to ambition, and they were happy—at least as happy as many of those who were merely the slaves of love.

"Eh bien!" said Komlossy. "You do not answer. You admit that love is unattainable."

"I admit that I have not attained it," she said thoughtfully.

That night, when she was leaving the house to dine with Mrs. Elliott, she went to the library, where, as usual, her father was working. Laying her hand on his shoulder, she said quietly:

"General Lloyd has asked me to marry him. What do you wish me to do?"

The Secretary looked up in astonishment. "General Lloyd wants to marry you!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he asked me this afternoon," she said coldly. "It would be a brilliant match, would it not?"

He took her hand and held it. Looking into her eyes, he said tenderly: "You do not love him, do you, Violet?"

"As much as I shall love any man."

"Are you quite sure?"

"As sure as I am of anything."

There was a bitter tone to her voice. Her father drew her toward him, until she sat on the arm of his chair.

"Be careful, Violet," he said. "Do not make a mistake you can never rectify."

She turned and looked at him. "Would it not please you if I were to marry General Lloyd?" she asked.

For a moment the Secretary did not reply; he gazed thoughtfully at the pile of papers on his desk.

"You know, Violet," he said finally, "that I am a poor man. I have nothing at present but my salary and a few odds and ends of property of not much value. I have devoted too much of my life to politics to grow rich. I had more a few years ago when you and your mother

went to Europe, but the panic took most of it."

"And General Lloyd is rich and influential," said Violet. "Together you would be a power in politics."

"Whatever happens, do not let such an argument influence you," he exclaimed.

Without replying she kissed him and left the room hurriedly. "If I cannot bring happiness to myself," she thought, "I can at least bring relief to him."

XVI

"AND SWEET REVENGE GROWS HARSH."
Othello, V. 2.

Mrs. Elliott's dinner was a rollicking affair, where formality was scattered to the four winds. Violet was in a reckless mood. Neither General Lloyd nor Ritchie Maitland was there, and for the moment she forgot that she was at the cross-roads where she must choose the way of the future. She plunged headlong into the merriment, and people paused to wonder and admire. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes were full of animation; she had never been more entertaining, nor so beautiful. It was an hour of mental abandon in which she tried to forget self.

When dinner was over, the party went to Mrs. Herkomer's musicale. They found the room already filled to overflowing. The leading artists of the opera had been brought over from New York to render a jumble of Wagner and "Home, Sweet Home," at so much per song, and the au-

dience, that is to say, the feminine portion, was for the moment casting admiring glances at Ivan Gereczow, a Slavonian Adonis with a tenor voice, and feigning an appreciation for the tumultuous chords of the "Götterdämmerung."

Mrs. Herkomer was a purveyor to society, tolerated for the cheer she provided. She was a long way from a seat on Olympus, but the gods deigned to honor her, occasionally, for the sake of her *chef*. She was, in a way, the rival of Mrs. Silas Smith, but the latter had a reason for being; her husband was a senator, whereas Mr. Herkomer was merely the proprietor of the St. Louis Street Railway system. At home he was a magnate, but in Washington he was only Mrs. Herkomer's husband—an absentee landlord, forced to reside at the national capital by the social ambitions of his wife.

The price-mark was invariably attached to Mrs. Herkomer's entertainments, but on the present occasion the zeros to the left of the decimal point had been visibly increased. Madame Scala was to receive $2,000 for a song, and Gereczow was to be paid extra for each encore. Madame Malvé

refused to sing because Scala, her great rival, had been previously engaged; but that was the only blot upon the occasion; all the lesser satellites were there in the form of contraltos, bassos, and baritones—and the total cost would have endowed a university professorship, had the funds been turned to such a prosaic use.

No wonder the ball-room was crowded, and that most of the people were bored. No one had the temerity to talk during such expensive music. From the view-point of entertainment, one of those drawing-room falsettos with an English accent, who sings whenever the conversation lags, at fifty dollars per night, was worth twenty Gereczows; at least that was the Philistine opinion of Dick Willing.

Violet glanced into the crowded ball-room. She was not in the mood for classical music—the spirit of rashness was still upon her; the reckless fire was in her dark eyes; her cheeks were flushed with excitement. She was defiant, and at war with the world; she cared not what happened. As she turned away from the ball-room, Maitland came toward her.

"Can 't I find you a seat?" he asked.

"Yes, if it is away from the music," she said.

"I know a nook under the stairs, where we can talk undisturbed," he answered.

She had not spoken to him alone since she had overheard his conversation with Phoebe Smith. She was glad to talk to him. She felt that she could meet him on equal terms; could give as well as take.

"You do n't like music, do you?" he said as he took the seat beside her in the nook under the stairs.

"I like Sousa's Band or a hand-organ."

"Another taste we have in common. Music hath charms to soothe a savage, but it takes a pretty girl to soothe me. I am ready to be soothed," he added in a flippant tone.

Violet looked at him resentfully. His manner angered her.

"Why should you need soothing?" she asked. "I thought conceited people were always serene."

"That is unkind. I thought you were my friend," he replied.

"Yes, Ritchie, I am your friend—the

one who understands you better than you do yourself."

"The woman does not live who understands me," he said with a laugh.

His way of saying that was boastful, even caddish; it made her thoroughly angry. She longed to humiliate him.

"Do you really imagine that your character is profound?" she asked.

"Do you really imagine that you understand me?" he replied.

"Ritchie Maitland," she answered sharply, "you make the mistake of supposing that your cleverness is commensurate with your vanity.

"I made the mistake of supposing that you were my friend."

"It is a friend's privilege to speak the truth."

"But not to insult," he said resentfully.

"Let me tell you the truth, then. It will do you good. You may decide afterward whether it is insulting."

"The truth about what?"

"About a young office-seeker who came to Washington to get an appointment. The story is interesting, and it has a moral."

"I have outgrown fairy tales and stories with morals," he said suspiciously.

"But I insist."

"Then gallantry compels me to listen; but I hate being lectured by innuendo.

"This is not a lecture or a fairy tale," she replied scornfully, "but merely a little romance with a dash of realism. You see, the hero of my tale was an office-seeker who was worldly-wise, so he did not come to Washington with a brass band and a delegation; on the contrary, he came deftly and discreetly, without blare of trumpets; he said little and did little until he had crept near the seats of the mighty, and learned that one in authority, who, as politicians say, "possessed the ear of the President," had a daughter who was influential, and, as he supposed, impressionable."

"What is the use of all this," Ritchie asked. "Is it not better left unsaid?"

"A story is often misjudged unless it is followed to the end."

Maitland shrugged his shoulders in acquiescence.

"My hero," continued Violet, "conceived the brilliant idea of reaching the man

of influence through the daughter. A heroic game, and exciting, too, for he came so near compromising himself that he was compelled to beat a hasty retreat; that is, after he discovered that his efforts were in vain, and the office he sought was given to a rival."

"Really, Violet, I protest," Maitland exclaimed. "You misjudge me."

"Wait until I have finished."

"Very well, if you insist."

"That is the story from the hero's point of view," she continued excitedly, "except that having been foiled in his search for office, he conceived the manly plan of making love to the only daughter of a millionaire, as a last resort."

"I refuse to listen to this stuff," protested Maitland.

"Oh, indeed!" she laughed. "Why I have just come to the heroine. You could not refuse to listen to the woes and trials of an unfortunate maiden, could you?"

"Well, go on with your fairy tale," he said, plunging his hands into his pockets resignedly.

"The fairy of my tale was young and guileless—at least, the hero so supposed. But appearances are sometimes deceiving. So it happened that the fairy lived much in the world, and knew the ways of men. When the young office-seeker appeared, she was looking for diversion. His schemes were very transparent, but, nevertheless, the sport was amusing. His attentions were quite assiduous—that is, to a certain point; but with wily precaution, he invariably tempered his love-making with enigmas and innuendos which he fancied were profound and guarded. Now, it happened that the heroine was amusing herself at the expense of the young man, so his schemes did not materialize exactly as he had expected. You see, she had a very dear friend, and together they played a diverting game in the world of politics. The clever young man was used advantageously in a bold political stroke. He failed to get his appointment, but a party feud was settled in the principal State of the Union."

"Do you mean—?" cried Maitland.

"That General Lloyd and I arranged to defeat your appointment, in order to prove

how utterly you were lacking in sincerity—certainly."

Maitland was silent. Anger was in his eyes; his hands twitched nervously.

"How do you like my story?" she asked. "Is it getting interesting?"

"You should become a novelist," he said with a sneer. "The plot is a trifle amateurish, however; it needs working up."

"Do not criticise before the story is finished," she answered coldly.

"Oh, there is more, is there?"

"Yes, there is more," she answered.

Ritchie Maitland was still contemptuous. There was but one means left to humiliate him. It was a desperate course, but in that moment of anger she resolved to take it. He must be humbled; he must be made to confess his inferiority, no matter what the cost might be. She was ready for any rash deed, if it would lift the weight from her heart. She was reckless and defiant. War was declared, and she must secure a victory. *Coûte que coûte.*

"Well," he said, examining his finger nails in a casual manner, "I am waiting for the denouement."

"In the denouement, the heroine becomes the good fairy," said Violet. "She and her friend take pity on the young office-seeker. They realise his shortcomings, and his lack of knowledge of the world, and decide that he ought to go abroad, where he may learn something of the world, and of women in particular. You see, the heroine and her friend are people of influence, so it is easy for them to obtain for the young man a post far more elevated than the humble office to which he aspired."

"What do you mean?" Ritchie exclaimed.

"I mean," Violet said calmly, "that your name is about to go to the Senate as Minister to Denmark, and that I am going to marry General Lloyd. How do you like the denouement?"

For a moment he sat there gazing at the floor; then he turned and looked at her. He met a contemptuous glance that made him turn his eyes away and wince. He was no longer defiant; his manner was sneaking, like that of a whipped puppy. That was her revenge.

"Really I am very grateful," he mut-

tered finally. "You have been a true friend. I—I congratulate you."

She turned and looked at him. How could he accept office from her when it was thrown to him like a sop to a dog. "If he had a spark of manhood in him," she thought, "he would resent such a gift from a woman who had told him in so many words that he was a cad—a woman who despised him."

"Ritchie Maitland," she said, rising from her seat, "I have but one favor to ask: Go to poor little Phoebe Smith and undeceive her—be generous for once in your life."

She walked away. His momentary impulse was to follow her and acknowledge that all she said was true; to ask forgiveness, and tell her that he loved her—loved for the first time in his life with a manly, generous love. For a moment he hesitated; then the old cynical smile crossed his lips. "It 's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he said with a shrug of the shoulders. "Things seem to be coming my way—why not let them come?"

In a moment of anger, Violet had taken a step from which there was no turning

back. She had seen Ritchie Maitland cringe before her; she had seen him confused and beaten, but at what price? She dared not think of the consequences. She had redeemed herself before the world; no one could say she had been jilted. The future? What did the future matter? Her pride was avenged.

She walked alone into the ball-room. Scala had just finished a song; the applause was dying away.

"Won't you have this seat, Miss Duncan?" said a voice beside her. She turned suddenly. For a moment her pulses throbbed violently.

"General Lloyd," she said, finally, with an effort, "I was looking for you. Do you mind stepping into the hall? I have something very important to say to you."

He followed her. When they were alone she stopped. Turning, she looked him firmly in the eyes and said: "I have just told Mr. Maitland that he is to be appointed Minister to Denmark."

"Then you will marry me?" he answered quietly.

"If you wish it."

"'THEN YOU WILL MARRY ME.'"

"That is the only answer I ask," he replied, taking her hand and kissing it.

The room grew black before her eyes.

"Get me a glass of water, won't you?" she asked. "Quick! I feel faint—it is so hot here."

General Lloyd bowed with his usual suavity, but there was a cold, hard look in his eyes which Violet did not notice.

XVII

"How love can trifle with itself."
Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV. 4.

"Well, what do you think of them?" said Komlossy, dropping into a seat beside Mrs. Cortland, during an afternoon tea at the Japanese legation.

"Think of whom?" asked Mrs. Cortland. "The new Brazilian minister and his wife?"

"No, the new engagements."

"Are they announced?"

"Yes, both of them this morning."

"I knew about them a week ago, so they do not interest me."

"Not interest you!" exclaimed the Hungarian, in astonishment. "Do you mean to say that you have no interest in this great social tragedy which is being enacted under your very nose?"

"Tragedy!" said Mrs. Cortland. "I should call it a farce."

"It is always a tragedy when a young girl marries an old man."

"And when a poor man marries a rich girl, I suppose."

"No, that part of it is quite right. I recommended that match myself. Indeed I may safely say I was the first to suggest the idea to Maitland and *la mère* Smith."

"Oh, indeed! So you have become a matrimonial agent, have you? I think you might find better mischief for your idle hands to do."

"Then you do n't approve—?"

"Of Phoebe Smith throwing herself away on Ritchie Maitland? Certainly not."

"I think the throwing is the other way. What is Phoebe Smith—a little parvenue."

"With a million or two."

"Exactly."

"And what is Ritchie Maitland?" asked Mrs. Cortland.

"Minister to Denmark. Nominated by General Lloyd, at the instigation of Violet Duncan," said Komlossy, sarcastically, "because she is in love with him—that is where the tragedy comes in."

"Violet is going to marry General Lloyd; the presumption is that she is in love with him," answered Mrs. Cortland dryly.

The minister shrugged his shoulders. "The presumption invariably is that a woman loves the man she is going to marry, but there is such a thing as presuming too much."

"If I had to choose," said Mrs. Cortland, "I would prefer marrying General Lloyd to Ritchie Maitland."

"Because he is richer?"

"No, because, in the natural course of events, he should die sooner."

"In either case, you do not approve of Violet Duncan's taste."

"I am very much disappointed in Violet."

"I suppose you think she ought to have married Jack Hardy."

"A woman ought to marry the man she loves; if she gets over loving him after marriage, that is another matter."

"And you think Violet loves Jack Hardy?"

"I think she does not love General Lloyd, that is all. But what is the use of discussing the matter?"

"Because there is nothing else to discuss," said Komlossy.

"There is the new Brazilian minister and his wife," answered Mrs. Cortland dryly.

Violet entered the room. There was a flutter of excitement, for her engagement was the nine-days wonder. People pressed forward to greet her, and she received their congratulations with an attempt to feign a happiness she did not feel. In a moment of pique she had promised to marry a man she did not love; a cold, calculating intriguer, the very touch of whose hand made her shiver. She had sacrificed herself to pride, but with what result? For one moment she had seen Ritchie Maitland confused and beaten. It had been a moment of exultation. But he had come forth the same disdainful Ritchie Maitland she had tried so hard to humble. He had accepted the Danish mission as his due, and now his engagement to Phoebe Smith was announced. He was to all appearances supremely contented with himself. This was the man for whom she had sold herself; a man whom she despised; a man whom she had never loved. She emphasized the word "never" to assure herself of its

truth. People thought she was marrying for money. She wished she had even that excuse. She was marrying for the sake of wounded pride—marrying because her life so far had been a failure, and the future held forth no inducements. Her lips drooped; there was a look of disappointment and age in her eyes. She hated the world and everybody in it—except Jack Hardy. She had known one loyal man, and she was thankful for it—now, when it was too late. She dared not think of Jack. When he learned the truth, he, too, would despise her. She tossed her head back with a smile. What did it matter? She was to be rich and powerful; the world would fawn upon her for the sake of the influence she would wield. What did it matter—if the world despised her—for she despised herself.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," said Komlossy, as he approached her, "you look too thoughtful for a bride-elect."

"Is not the contemplation of marriage sufficiently serious to make one thoughtful?" she asked.

"Now that it is all settled, and you have

made your choice, you ought to think of nothing more serious than your trousseau."

"Could anything be more serious than one's trousseau?" said Violet with a laugh.

"I see," answered Komlossy, "that you are fully alive to your new responsibilities. Now, permit me to extend my congratulations."

"I do n't want to be congratulated. I have heard nothing else all day. People come and tell me all sorts of things they do n't mean, and I have to smile and try to look pleased. It is a great bore, Komlossy.

"Very well, then, I think you are making a terrible mistake. You are giving up your girlhood, your liberty, your supremacy—all to enter that unknown land of matrimony, so alluring to strangers, so irksome to its inhabitants. In other words, you are a fool to get married. Do you like that better?"

"A great deal," said Violet. "Because I fancy it is nearer what you believe."

"I believe," answered the little Hungarian, "that for an attractive woman marriage is unavoidable. The only way to face the

problem is philosophically—make a wise marriage as you are doing."

Violet thought Komlossy was becoming too frank. She was on the point of replying angrily, but checked herself.

"When do you intend to marry Mrs. Cortland?" she said suddenly.

"Whenever she will marry me."

"To-morrow, then," laughed Violet.

Komlossy frowned. "A year ago," he said, "Brankovan confided to me that he was madly in love with Mrs. Cortland. I thought it would be a good idea to cut him out. So I became desperately attentive myself. One day I arranged a rendezvous at a secluded spot near the Soldier's Home. We were to meet at an early hour and walk among the shaded groves while all Washington was sleeping in ignorance of our trysting place. I rode out at the appointed time, laughing meanwhile at the gullible Brankovan. Hitching my horse at a convenient distance, I stepped boldly across the sward, thinking of the joy that awaited me, when lo and behold, there was Brankovan pacing nervously to and fro, like a caged panther, but there was no lady. She

had made the same appointment with both of us, and left us to meet each other. I assure you a duel was but narrowly averted. Since then I have never made love to Mrs. Cortland."

"But I am sure you are in love with her," said Violet. "A man invariably loves the woman who makes a fool of him."

"But a woman never loves the man she has made a fool of, so there you are. *'Il-y-a toujours l'un qui aime et l'autre qui se laisse aimer.'* Take my advice: always let some one else do the loving—it is much less troublesome."

Komlossy walked away as he said that, and a retired admiral came to talk to Violet. She found it an effort to listen to the complimentary phrases of the old sea-dog, because she was thinking hard about what Komlossy had been saying, and wondering whether she had solved the marriage problem philosophically. There is a vast difference, however, between philosophy and felicity.

A little later Mrs. Cortland came toward Violet.

"Violet," she said, "I do n't believe in

perfunctory congratulations—they mean so little. I hope you are happy. No one deserves happiness more than you do, dear."

Violet looked at Mrs. Cortland curiously. "Do you think any one is ever happy for more than a very short time?" she asked.

"You are too young," said Mrs. Cortland, "to look at life in that way. I do n't believe in cynics. A cynic is only the dupe of his own follies. There is such a thing as happiness, but it is not self-gratification or self-sufficiency; it is, I should say, merely the habit of good intentions."

"Oh, be good and you 'll be happy," Violet laughed. "That is very trite, Mrs. Cortland."

"Be true to yourself," said Mrs. Cortland. "That is all a woman has to do in this world."

"I thought she had to be true to her husband." Violet said this flippantly. She did not want to talk seriously with Mrs. Cortland. She was very fond of her, and it made her uncomfortable to feel that she disapproved of her approaching marriage. It had seemed so easy to brave criticism, to

stifle the promptings of her heart, but now she was frightened by her own weakness. She turned to Mrs. Cortland and said suddenly:

"I hate to have you disapprove of me. I do n't mind what others think; but you—oh, if you only understood, you would think differently about me."

Then she walked away abruptly.

"Poor child," said Mrs. Cortland, looking after her, "she has too much heart for the part she is playing."

Violet drove home from the Japanese legation with General Lloyd. It was nearly dark, and the street lamps were already lighted. Once she had enjoyed talking to him; his knowledge of men and of the world had interested her; but now she drew back instinctively into her corner of the brougham and feigned fatigue. She was afraid to be alone with this man with whom she was to spend her life; this old grey-haired man. She looked up suddenly, as though awaking from a dream. The light of a street lamp flickered for a moment on his face. How cold and deliberate his features were.

"Why did you look at me like that?" he asked.

"Did I look at you? Pardon me, I was only thinking."

"You were thinking about me," he said.

"I was thinking about the future."

"And regretting the past," he added frigidly.

"I have nothing to regret," she said firmly.

"And everything to live for," he replied with a short laugh. "There is but one thing in this world worth living for: it is power. Together we shall have power, Violet; we shall sway the destinies of men."

"Yes," she said, "we shall sway the destinies of men. We shall be happy."

He turned and looked at her. "Are you sorry you are going to marry me?" he asked.

"I am sorry I do not love you," she said suddenly. "That is all."

"You are frank," he answered.

"Have I ever pretended anything else? I hope I am not a hypocrite."

"No, it was a fair bargain," he sighed. "I made the terms."

They drove on in silence. Finally the

carriage stopped. General Lloyd entered the house with Violet.

"I shall see you to-night," she said, as he turned to go. "It was very kind of Mrs. Herkomer to give us a dinner. I scarcely know her."

He took her hand.

"Why are you so deliberate in everything you say to me?" he asked.

"Because everything I say to you is purely a matter of deliberation."

He seized both her hands and looked into her face angrily. "You forget you are going to be my wife," he cried.

She returned his glance calmly. "You forget," she said, "that you wished to marry a woman whose heart had been broken. Your wish will be realised, I think."

"Violet," he said more tenderly, "try and make the best of a bad bargain. Try and love me just a little."

"I thought you did not believe in love," she answered coldly.

He drew her toward him, and held her tightly in his arms.

"You are making me believe in love," he said. "You are so cruel." He kissed her.

Violet shuddered. It was the first time he had kissed her.

"Do n't," she said feebly.

He took her face between his hands, and holding her away from him, glared at her fiercely. "I will make you love me," he cried. Then he released her suddenly, and pushing her from him he left the room without a word or a gesture of farewell.

Violet stood looking at the open door.

"Oh, I can 't bear it—I can 't bear it!" she sighed.

Her face hardened. She pressed her lips together firmly. "We will sway the destinies of men," she said, laughing hoarsely. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, she turned suddenly and walked toward the writing-table. Seating herself, she took pen and paper, and wrote hurriedly this note:

"DEAR JACK:—I have something to tell you. Something that will make you feel very badly. I am going to be married, Jack. I am going to marry General Lloyd. There is so much I should like to say to you—so much that is in my heart to say—but what would be the use? Forget me,

Jack—I was never worthy of your friendship. Think of me as I really am—a vain, selfish thing. I told you that once before. Do you remember the time? I shall never forget it, for all the good that has ever come into my life has come from knowing you. Jack, I can't say more. I realise now how thoroughly brave and good you are, but sometimes realisation comes too late.

Good-bye,

"VIOLET."

When she had finished writing she took the note and read it slowly. Then, folding it carefully, she placed it in an envelope, and taking up the pen again she wrote the address:

"JOHN W. HARDY, ESQ.,
"Lieutenant 12th Cavalry,
"Fort Riley, Kans."

Turning the envelope slowly in her hands, she gazed long into the dying embers of the fire. Then, tossing back her head suddenly, she seized the letter and tore it into little fragments.

"Let him think of me as the world thinks of me," she cried aloud, burying her face in her hands.

XVIII

"SO IS THE BARGAIN."
As You Like It. V. 4.

They were taking supper after the play in the restaurant of a New York hotel, Violet, Mrs. Cortland, General Lloyd, and Komlossy. Violet had run over from Washington with Mrs. Cortland to interview dressmakers and milliners, while Komlossy had the peculiar habit of appearing when least expected—that is to say, when Mrs. Cortland least expected him.

People wondered why Violet should begin the selection of her trousseau months before her marriage—but those who wondered, overlooked the wedding of Ritchie Maitland and Phoebe Smith.

All Washington had been convulsed with anticipatory excitement regarding this event. The wildest rumors were afloat as to the extravagance of the preparations, while the marriage of the daughter of the richest man in the Senate with the newly-

appointed Minister to Denmark afforded the representatives of the new journalism a rare opportunity for the exploitation of the lingère's art.

It was the day of Ritchie Maitland's wedding; but the little group at the supper table were seemingly unmindful of the episode which engrossed society at the National Capital. They had already been put in good humor by a rollicking farce, and now the lights and the laughter, the music and the crowd, were stimulus sufficient to make even Violet forget for the moment Ritchie Maitland. She had grown to look upon him as a sneak and time-server. He was loathsome to her, and when she thought that he had influenced her life, she hated herself and him. She could not meet him without a feeling of repugnance—a desire to tell him how thoroughly she despised him. That was why she had avoided his wedding. She could not bear to think that she had been the victim sacrificed at the altar of his triumph. But now, amid the laughter and the music, she forgot for the moment her unhappiness.

"I love to see people—I love to see

a crowd," she said, glancing about the room.

All sorts and conditions were there; dandies of the metropolis, conscious of their supremacy; would-be swells, over-dressed and blatant; Westerners with "money to burn;" Hebraic financiers, statesmen, a bridal couple from the country staring in wonderment. Some the waiters served obsequiously, others they treated with indifference or scorn. There was variety among the women, too, for the half-world has a certain fascination for women of character when contact with it is confined to the interchange of glances.

In answer to Violet's remark, Komlossy glanced about him scornfully. "Cheap," he said, "cheap. The moment a place in New York becomes fashionable, it is spoiled by the rabble."

"To me the rabble is the most attractive part," said Mrs. Cortland. "How tiresome it would be if there were only the swells."

"And how tired the swells would be," replied General Lloyd, "if there were no rabble to envy them."

"Bah," said Komlossy. "That is the trouble with Americans. Everything is so new to them that even being a swell is like having a new toy—the fact must be paraded around for all the other children to envy."

"The trouble with you, Komlossy," retorted Mrs. Cortland, "is that you are too old to sympathize with us children."

The little diplomat frowned—his age was a sensitive point.

"You see we are all against you, Komlossy," said Violet.

"I still maintain that rabbles are vulgar, and that this is a rabble," snapped the minister, draining his champagne glass, and glancing about him with an expression of disgust.

"I do n't know but you are right," said Mrs. Cortland, "when such pronounced creatures as that come here."

They all followed Mrs. Cortland's eyes. A stunning-looking woman stood in the doorway. A man was with her, and they were evidently waiting for a table. Her face had that half sad, half defiant expression so common to women who have had to fight the world. She was strikingly beau-

tiful; dreamy eyes, with curling lashes and arched brows, a clear delicate skin, and almost baby-like lips. Her hair was the Titian shade of red. It fell about her face in wavy folds, and was caught together carelessly at the neck. It was her hair and the extravagant clothes she was wearing which had called forth Mrs. Cortland's remarks.

"Oh," replied Komlossy, "do n't you know her? That is Camilla Cameron. You must have seen her at the Frivolity theatre."

"Why, of course," replied Mrs. Cortland, raising her eyeglass.

"She is very beautiful," said Violet. As she spoke the actress met her glance. Violet turned her eyes away. She saw an expression of annoyance and embarrassment on General Lloyd's face. He was looking in the other direction. Violet turned to look at the actress again. She met her eyes and smiled in a way that was annoying.

"Did you see her stare at me?" she said to Mrs. Cortland.

"Why should n't she?" interjected Komlossy. "You stared at her."

Camilla Cameron and her friend passed

by them and took seats at an adjoining table. Violet stole covert glances at the actress. Her expression, at once so bold and yet so innocent, fascinated her. She caught herself listening to the conversation at the next table.

"It 's perfectly absurd to wait here any longer," Camilla Cameron was saying. "I never saw such beastly service. Come,—I am going." Her companion remonstrated faintly.

"I won't be treated so. Here we have been for fully ten minutes without any one coming near us. I am going this instant. It will teach them a lesson." With a petulant toss of the head she left her seat.

As she passed their table Violet saw her smile at General Lloyd. He turned his eyes away and colored.

A quick expression of anger crossed the actress' face. She stopped suddenly. "I say, Dick," she said, "you need n't be so uppish with an old pal."

"How dare you!" said the General under his breath.

The actress laughed. Then turning to Violet she said suddenly: "You 'll find he

has a bad temper, Miss Duncan—at least that was my experience."

"You 'll pay for this," hissed General Lloyd.

"Really!" said the actress, with a shrug of the shoulders. Then she passed quickly out of the room.

There was a moment of silence. Komlossy tried to look unconcerned. General Lloyd was trembling with rage and mortification, while Mrs. Cortland looked at Violet pityingly—for the moment she was at a loss for anything to say.

Violet was the first to break the silence. She was pale, and her lips trembled as she spoke. "I hope you did not forget those seats for to-morrow night, Richard," she said, addressing General Lloyd.

"I hear there is to be a great crowd," put in Komlossy, glad of an opportunity to speak. "Malvé has never sung Carmen before."

"I have something better than seats," replied General Lloyd. "I have Mrs. Des Brosses's box."

But the conversation was labored. Each was thinking his own thoughts. Soon Mrs. Cortland made the motion to leave the

table. She and Violet were staying in the hotel, so they wandered toward the elevator. General Lloyd followed quickly. "I wish to speak to you," he said to Violet.

She turned and looked him full in the face.

"Not to-night," she said. "I could not talk to you to-night."

"As you will," he answered, bowing perfunctorily.

Mrs. Cortland had never been taken so completely off her guard before. Though a woman of the world, she had been so shocked by the actress's extraordinary conduct that she had simply looked on in amazement, unable to do anything to relieve the embarrassment.

She felt such sympathy for Violet that she longed to do something or say something to make the shock easier for her to bear; but when she reached their room, all she did was to place her arm tenderly on Violet's shoulder, and murmur, "poor child."

Violet turned and looked at her. Evident determination was in her eyes.

"I am glad it happened," she said.

"Glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Cortland.

"Yes," answered Violet. "That—that woman has taught me to realise that I am no better than she. We have both sold ourselves. What is the difference between us? Merely one of conventionality—morally we are the same."

"Do n't talk like that, child," protested Mrs. Cortland. "You do n't know what you are saying. It is not too late. You need not marry General Lloyd. You have been humiliated in public. You have a right to break your engagement."

Violet shook her head thoughtfully. "No," she said. "It would not bring back my self-respect, nor the respect of one I might have loved had I not been a fool."

"I wish you would listen to reason, Violet," said Mrs. Cortland, stroking her hair gently. "I am older than you, and know the world better."

"But you do not know all that I have done," Violet answered, looking up into her face hopelessly. "I sold myself to General Lloyd in a moment of pique—a moment of wounded pride. He has done

what I have asked of him. There is honor even among thieves."

She took both Mrs. Cortland's hands and held them tightly. "Forget what I have told you," she continued. "The excitement made me forget myself."

"Violet," answered the elder woman, "what you say to me in confidence is safe. But, for God's sake, break your engagement!"

Violet shook her head slowly. "No," she said, "I am going to marry General Lloyd. He may insult me if he likes—he may beat me, but I am going to marry him. He has fulfilled his part of the bargain—I shall fulfill mine."

XIX

"Is 't not a brave man?"
Troilus and Cressida, I. 2.

Violet stood in the window of a Michigan Avenue hotel, gazing at the park below. The panoply of war was there, for Chicago was in the throes of industrial strife. A white city had arisen during the night, and now artillery frowned upon the crowd where only yesterday the ranting of demagogues had called forth deeds of violence. Groups of blue-coated soldiers lay stretched upon the grass, and bronzed sentries paced to and fro with measured tread. A flag fluttered before the commandant's quarters; troop-horses picketed together munched their forage with peaceful content, while crouching before smouldering camp-fires were the company cooks preparing the noon-day meal. Beyond the white camp was blue Lake Michigan, and beyond the lake was the hazy sky of summer.

It seemed to Violet that this tented city

must have been there always, so regularly was it built, so quietly was it ordered—but the dragon's teeth of insurrection had been sown but yesterday. The crowd gazed in sullen silence at the tawny warriors, for there was an air of earnestness about those regulars of Uncle Sam, which even the mob respected. For days the police and militia had temporized with the rioters, until the wheels of commerce were still, and the glare of burning freight cars lighted the sky by night. Then the little garrison from Sheridan had marched quietly to the front, and held the mobs at bay until troops hurriedly summoned from distant posts arrived to reinforce the faithful command. Now an army held the strategic points in the great city, and those soldiers sleeping there in the sun were merely the reserves kept in readiness to march to the place of danger.

Secretary Duncan had been to Springfield for a needed rest, and Violet accompanied him. A year ago nothing would have persuaded her to visit Springfield, but her views of life had changed since then. She was glad to be away from the world—away from General Lloyd. In

September she was to be married. She counted the intervening hours like a prisoner awaiting a death sentence.

But the quiet days at Springfield were cut short by the industrial war. Secretary Duncan was summoned hurriedly to Washington. He managed to reach Chicago, but there his progress was arrested. Not a train was running to the Eastward.

As Violet stood in the window, gazing at the camp below, she repeated to herself these lines: "But four things in this world are: Power and women, horses and war."

"Power," she said. "What is it? Merely gratified conceit. 'Horses and war.' Yes, I can understand their fascination—war, especially—for in war one must forget self—that is, unless one is a coward. To forget self even for a moment must be happiness."

There was a hasty movement in the crowd below. A mounted orderly passed through the lines and dashed on toward the commandant's tent.

Violet watched the dusty trooper dismount, salute, and hand his dispatches to the commanding officer. Then an order

was given—a bugle sounded, and a group of soldiers stretched upon the grass were on their feet in an instant, hurriedly saddling the horses of their troop.

Again the bugle called, and the troopers swung into the saddle. Violet could not help admiring that swarthy line astride their wiry mounts. They were "business" soldiers, ready for action; blue flannel shirts, rakish slouch hats, canvas belts bristling with long thin cartridges, a single fluttering guidon, and here and there a yellow stripe upon the trousers of an officer; there was none of the pomp of the holiday parade.

A sharp order was given. Then, breaking into column of fours, the troops rode through the lines into the street. A loud hiss arose from the crowd, answered by the clear notes of the bugle; then the clatter of hoofs resounded on the pavement, as the command broke into a trot and dashed off down the street. That officer riding at the head of the column—the gray campaign hat hid his features, but Violet would have known the tall, powerful figure anywhere. It was Jack Hardy. A sudden thrill of

pleasure filled her heart. She leaned from the window and waved her hand. Then she laughed at her foolish action. Who could see her there, six stories above the street? Her soldier! She sighed at the thought. Oh, how irrevocably she was separated from that officer, riding there at the head of his troop.

She looked long after the line of cavalry —until only a faint cloud of dust was visible down the long, straight boulevard. Then she turned away from the window sadly. "Poor old Jack," she sighed; "how little I understood him in the old days. He is a man, every inch of him—a girl should be proud to love him,"—she hesitated. "And I thought love was so different. I thought it must be sudden and overwhelming—I thought it could not come gently and gradually, as mere friendship, until by and by it ripened into love. Yes, I thought a great many foolish things then, and now I am paying the price—now, when it is too late." She covered her eyes with her hands. "Pride!" she cried. "If it were not for the pride which masters me, I might be happy even now."

Late that afternoon, Violet looking from the window saw Jack Hardy's troopers ride back to camp. They rode slowly this time, walking their horses. The commanding general was talking earnestly with her father in the adjoining room—the door was ajar, and she heard their words:

"We are powerless, Mr. Secretary," the General was saying, "without orders to fire."

"The President insists that the riot can be put down without bloodshed by a sufficient show of force," answered Secretary Duncan. "We can order more troops here."

"The President is in Washington. He does not know the temper of the mob. Pardon me, Mr. Secretary, but you yourself do not know what the troops have to contend with."

"The mob has not attacked the troops openly as yet," said the Secretary.

"No, but they continue to destroy property. It is four days since the Sheridan garrison were ordered in, and the riot grows more formidable every hour. The entire army would not be sufficient to guard every point. The mob grows more insolent every

day; they think the troops are afraid to fire. They need one good lesson—just a volley or two right into them—there won't be any trouble after that."

"I can't bear to think of slaughtering innocent people. Order more troops—the batteries at Riley; they are afraid of artillery."

"Soldiers are not policemen, Mr. Secretary," said the General indignantly. "They are trained to fight. This work is destroying their efficiency; the men have been abused and insulted to such an extent that I cannot answer for their discipline much longer. I fear they will fire without orders, and I don't know that I will blame them, either."

"You do not understand a mob, General," answered the Secretary. "Mobs are arrant cowards; they talk, but they don't fight—not with regulars, at least."

"I should like to give orders to fire, just once—I will answer for the rest. Chicago would be as quiet as a country village. Do you remember ninety-four? It was the same story then. When the troops fired, it was all over."

"And innocent people were killed."

"Innocent people," expostulated the General. "A man who joins a mob is n't innocent—if he is, he deserves to be shot for being a fool. Just let me tell you one incident which happened only this afternoon, and you will see what my officers and men have to contend with. Fortunately, the right man was in the right place, or it might not have ended so successfully. A mob of about five thousand made a sudden demonstration against Slow & Co.'s packing-house. It was a new point of attack, and there were no troops there. They telephoned for assistance. I ordered B Troop, 12th Cavalry, Lieutenant Hardy commanding, to their relief."

Violet started at the mention of Jack's name. She had seen the troops march forth—had seen them return. She listened attentively for the story of their prowess.

"When the command arrived," the General continued, "the rioters were tearing down the fence and hurling stones at the windows. Hardy ordered a charge—mobs do n't like horses—they hate to get trampled on. So he cleared the street, and taking

possession of the packing-house, threw out his sentries."

"Well," said the Secretary, "he did it without firing, did n't he?"

"Exactly. They run at the first sight of the troops—but when they see they are only men, and only a few of them at that, they get over being afraid and come back. When Lieutenant Hardy had thrown out his sentries, he left a sergeant in command at the picket line and ordered the troop inside the big fence. Then the mob came back—thousands of men—howling and shouting. A big butcher from the stock-yards was the leader. He harangued the crowd about the cowardice of the soldiers; said they were afraid to shoot—all they needed to do was to rush them and grab their muskets—there were only ten of them there—the others dare n't come out. To prove his words, he stepped up to a sentry and slapped his face, calling him a vile name. The man, writhing under the insult, fingered the trigger of his piece, but stood there immovable—he had his orders. The crowd yelled with delight. A shower of stones and sticks was their reply. One

soldier was badly wounded in the face. The butcher, delighted with the outcome of his prowess, stepped up to another sentry and spat in his face. This man threw his piece to his shoulder. 'Stop!' cried the sergeant in command. 'Not without orders!' Down came the piece."

"I thought you could not answer for the discipline, General," laughed Secretary Duncan.

"Wait till you hear the rest, Mr. Secretary. Trembling with rage, the sergeant went to Lieutenant Hardy. 'For God's sake, sir, let the men fire,' he said with tears in his eyes. 'Not until we are fired upon. Our orders are positive.' Then the sergeant told how the sentries had been insulted. 'Men can't stand that, Lieutenant,' he pleaded. 'The boys will fire without orders.'

" 'Then they will be tried for murder,' said Hardy coldly. The sergeant looked at his officer beseechingly. Then, taking off his blouse and hat he threw them on the ground. 'There, sir,' he said, 'I ain't in the uniform now. Let me go out and lick that fellow, won't you, sir?' 'Put on your

blouse, sergeant,' answered Hardy sternly. Then without another word he walked quickly out of the gate and faced the mob. The big butcher was talking to the crowd, and calling on them to clean the soldiers out. When the mob caught sight of Hardy they shouted with delight. 'Look at the dude!' and all that sort of thing. Without a word, Hardy walked up to the butcher, and touched him quickly on the shoulder. 'Did you insult an American soldier acting under orders? Answer me!' The fellow took a step backward. Then the mob jeered. 'Chaw the dude up, Billy. Make sausage of him!' This gave the bully encouragement. 'I did spit in the face of a soldier, and I 'll do the same to you,' he said. 'You coward,' cried Hardy. 'Defend yourself, for I 'm going to knock you down.' Then the butcher doubled his fists, and led out at the officer, but Hardy was too lively for him. He made one or two beautiful passes, and then, quick as a flash, he got in a cross-counter, and the butcher lay flat upon the pavement. The crowd yelled with delight. Hardy was master of the situation then. 'Boys,' he

said, turning around and addressing them, 'I 'm here for business. I 'm not looking for trouble, but I 'll know what to do with it when it comes. You see those soldiers there? Each of them can shoot a dozen times a minute, and kill three times out of five at three hundred yards. Now, I 'm not going to tell them to shoot until I have to, but when I do, God help you—I can 't.'

" 'Hurrah for the dude! He ain 't no slouch!' yelled the crowd.

" 'Now, boys,' Hardy continued, pointing at the butcher who had just risen to his feet, and was slinking away, 'as long as you have n't got anything better than that to send to the scratch, I sha'n't worry much; but my advice to you is to go quietly home, and not monkey with a buzz saw—because you 'll get hurt; the buzz saw won't.' He stopped then, and looked at the crowd smiling.

" 'Three cheers for the Lieutenant!' 'I say, Mister, come around to Lacy's and we 'll buy you a drink!' 'I 'll back you against Fitzsimmons!' and similar cries showed the nature of the crowd. Then one fellow got on a barrel, and called out

loudly: 'Boys, there 's a company of militia over at the Wabash yards. We can have some fun over there—we do n't want to stay here—this dude is too good a fellow to quarrel with—and besides, I do n't want to get hurt, do you?' With a loud cheer for Hardy, the crowd broke away in the direction of the Wabash yards, but they never got there—there were too many saloons on the way."

"Well," said the Secretary, "I do n't see but you have proved how unnecessary it is to fire. If one brave man can disperse a mob alone—"

"If," answered the general. "But how many officers like Hardy are there in the army?"

"Yes, Hardy is a soldier, every inch of him," said Secretary Duncan. "But he certainly did not tell that story himself."

"No, sir. His report was simply: 'Mob dispersed quietly on appearance of command—await further orders.' I sent a company of infantry to relieve him. Cavalry is too valuable to garrison a packing-house. I learned the story through my in-

telligence service. You may not know, Mr. Secretary, that I have a volunteer secret service corps—a lot of young bicyclists, who like to be mixed up in a row of this sort. They have relay stations all over the city. Some of them are in every mob. If anything occurs, I get a full report in a very short time. In that way I keep informed of the movements of the enemy."

Violet entered the room quietly. "General Wright," she said, "I happened to hear what you were saying. The door was open, and I was too interested to close it. Lieutenant Hardy is an old friend of mine, you know."

"Then you should be proud of your friend. He is a brave man," answered the General with enthusiasm.

There was a ring to those words which thrilled Violet through and through—they suggested strength and daring, and manliness. The General's story had brought Jack nearer to her than he had ever been before. Lieutenant Hardy crushing that bully, and facing the mob alone, was a very different person from the quiet, diffident

Jack who had wearied her with too much loving. He was a hero, and deep in her heart every woman loves a hero.

"A brave man!" She repeated those words over and over again that night as she turned restlessly in her bed. In vain she tried to close her eyes, but the events of the year rushed confusedly through her brain. Crafty Ritchie Maitland, with no more manliness than a crawling worm—she shuddered at the thought of him. Yet he had fascinated her once. And the man she was going to marry—that cold, circumspect politician, with his brutal views of womanhood and love—it had been so easy to give herself to him in a moment of anger—to sell herself for power and riches. She had forsworn the hope of love—and now, when it was too late—"Fool!" she said aloud, in anger, "what right have you to any other fate?" But she could not sleep. She was thinking of Jack Hardy—the one man in all the world whom she might love, were love possible. The thought came to her that she might break her promise to General Lloyd. But pride was her besetting

vice. "Never," she cried; "never will I break my word."

The first ray of morning entered the room. Violet sprang from her bed impulsively and ran to the open window. She had not slept the entire night long, and she welcomed the day.

In the park below was the sleeping camp, gray and shadowy. Before the guard tent, a group of gnome-like figures crouched before a fire. The measured beat of the sentries' feet echoed from the pavement. All else was silence. Beyond the park was slumbering Michigan, calm and silvery. Fleecy clouds floated among the stars, while, hovering low above the water, was a bank of purple mist. Across the sky came a glow of orange light—the shadowy grass below grew mossy green, and golden ripples danced upon the lake. The clear notes of a distant trumpet were echoed nearer and nearer, from camp to camp, and sleepy soldiers groping from their tents formed shadowy lines of blue, in obedience to reveille call. Then the sky glowed crimson, and the sun disc rose above the lake, birds

twittered, and the noises of the day broke forth. A tall officer was standing before his tent, and Violet knew, as she gazed at his familiar form, that the love for which she had waited so long had dawned.

XX

"FOR LOVE OF YOU, NOT HATE."
Two Gentlemen of Verona, III. 1.

Amid the clatter of hoofs and clank of scabbards, Troop B, 12th Cavalry, swept through the sally-port at Fort Sheridan. There was a glint of yellow plumes above a cloud of dust—then a sharp command, and the sun-burned troopers swung into line from columns of fours, and trotted on to the quickstep music of the band.

There were other troops of horse—a regiment in all—manœuvring in squadron formation, with fluttering guidons and sabres flashing in the light of the setting sun. From the barracks and the camp beyond they came with mounted band, and brilliant officers with caracoling chargers, to parade before the Secretary of War.

It was a sight to thrill—with all the splendor and glitter of military pomp; but to Violet it seemed tawdry and spectacular —after the war scenes of the fortnight be-

fore. There was Jack Hardy riding in command of Troop B, with head erect and eyes straight to the front—but the gilded shoulder-knots and the yellow plumes, the helmet cord and the horse trappings—it reminded her of Washington, and the carpet soldiers there. She thought of Troop B as she had seen them ride forth from camp—"business" soldiers, with gray slouch hats and flannel shirts, with canvas belts, and carbines swinging from the saddle-trees—and her heart thrilled with pride. But that glittering dragoon—was it the earnest soldier who had faced a mob alone—the brave officer who won his general's praise—the man she loved?

She trembled at the thought of love, and turned her face away. Duty bound her to another. Was it duty or pride? She asked herself the question and laughed—then a hard look came into her eyes. She would crush that new-born love; crush it as a thing which could never be.

There was a dance at the Officers' Mess that evening; three thousand regulars were camped at the post—the army which had defended Chicago. Now that the strikes

were over, there were to be manœuvres and practice marches, before the troops were dispatched to their various posts.

It was a gala night at Fort Sheridan. The visiting officers swelled the ranks of the dancing men, and maids and matrons came from miles around.

Violet, who had dined with the commanding officer, came late to the dance. As she entered the room the band was playing a lively two-step. The floor was filled with dancers—a confusion of ribbons and tulle, gilt buttons and broad stripes of red, yellow, and white.

Jack Hardy stood by the door—he had no heart for dancing. Violet was at the post, and was expected at the ball. He had not seen her since the parting in Washington, yet the thought of meeting her was painful.

It seemed to him that he could not bear to look into her face again.

He heard the flutter of a dress behind him; he trembled, for he knew that it was Violet.

"Jack," she said; "are n't you going to speak to me?"

He took her hand in a dazed sort of way. There was much that he wished to say, but the words were not forthcoming.

"I am very glad to see you," he faltered finally

"You do n't act glad, Jack," said Violet. "You look as though you 'd lost your last friend."

She had thought she could meet him without embarrassment, but there was a different feeling in her heart from anything she had known before—a feeling of unworthiness and reverence. She had tried to talk to him in the old bantering way, but her words sounded silly and childish.

"Violet," said Hardy suddenly, "come with me, won't you? I want to talk with you. You know it is a long time since I have seen you."

"Yes," she answered slowly, "a very long time."

They walked together in the moonlight. The wind soughed through the trees, and from the ball-room came the distant strains of music. In silence they passed one after another of the pretty officers' houses lining

the way. Each had so much to say, yet each hesitated to speak.

"You had better put this around you," said Hardy finally, throwing a yellow-lined cloak over her shoulders. "It is very chilly here."

"Thank you, Jack," she answered, with a shiver. She was frightened at her own feebleness. They reached the bluff by the lake. The brilliant moonlight cast sombre shadows about them. Below on the beach the combing surf sent its spray hissing over the sand in a myriad of silvery snakes.

He was the first to break the silence. "It was unkind of you, Violet, not to tell me of your engagement—to let me hear of it from others."

He said this because it was uppermost in his thoughts—he had not meant to say it.

"I did write you, Jack; believe me, I did. I was afraid to send the letter."

"Afraid," he repeated. "I do not understand. Why should you be afraid?"

She turned and looked at him. "Because my whole life has been one horrible mistake. I have had two selves; one all

ambition and pride, urging me on to acts of vanity, making me what all the world thinks me — a heartless flirt; the other — oh, I cannot bear to think what my life might have been had the other self been stronger. Now, when it is too late—"

"Too late, Violet!" he exclaimed. "Is it too late?"

"Yes," she answered, looking over the moonlit lake. "Nothing can change me now. I am what I have made myself."

"I believe in you, Violet; I shall always believe in you.

"Do n't, Jack, do n't say that," she protested. "You are too noble to understand such a mean person as I am. Despise me; I wish you would. I should feel happier. But to have you believe in me, even now— I can 't stand that."

He looked into her face long and earnestly.

"I love you, Violet. I shall love you always," he said, trembling.

It was the cry of his soul to hers. Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. For a brief moment she felt the caress of his strong arms—felt the

"'NOW WHEN IT IS TOO LATE.'"

fervent touch of his lips—then with a cry of pain she pushed him from her.

"I hate you," she said; "I hate you. Never let me see you again."

He seized her hand, not understanding her words.

"Violet, my darling," he cried, "what do you mean?"

She snatched her hand from his grasp.

"Do n't come near me. I hate you—can 't you hear that—I hate you—never let me see you again—never so long as you live."

He stood there like one stunned, unable to speak, unable to comprehend the meaning of her words.

She laughed—a short hysterical laugh.

"I am going to marry General Lloyd, not you," she cried. "I am going to have power—yes, power. I have no heart—I cannot love. You may have the love, the horses and the war."

Then she turned suddenly, and ran quickly back through the woods. Jack Hardy stood there gazing into the darkness. He heard her laughter echo through the trees; he heard the distant strains of

the regimental band playing for the throng of dancers—but he did not hear the low cry of anguish which came from Violet's lips: "I have broken his heart and mine, but I could not break my word."

XXI

"LOVE'S FULL SACRIFICE."
Troilus and Cressida, I. 2.

"You are tired, dear; perhaps you would like to be alone?"

General Lloyd said this with an attempt at tenderness. He stood in the door of his room, looking at Violet.

She did not reply. She had thrown herself upon a lounge, and lay with her face buried in the cushion.

He closed the door quietly, and left the room.

Married! Violet shuddered at the thought. That day seemed an age. Yet it was only evening. In a vague way she recalled the church, crowded with the faces of her friends, the altar and the flowers. She heard the droning of the clergyman's voice and her own replies, spoken mechanically. But there was one vision so real, so hopeless, that the memory filled her heart with despair. Jack Hardy sat in the body

of the church. As she passed by, on the arm of her husband, she met his reproachful glance. She saw his pale, desperate face, and she realised the awfulness of the step she had taken; every act in her life came back. She had been swept on by a torrent of pride and vain-glory, until, like a drowning man, she felt the waters close above her.

Jack Hardy, the man she loved; her heart cried out to him for pardon. In wrecking his life she had wrecked her own happiness—the punishment was meet, so far as she was concerned, but why should he suffer?

She had turned away from him in laughter, with words of hatred on her lips, at the moment when she might have realised the love for which her soul was starving. Since then, he had come to her again and again, but she had refused to see him—the door of her house had been closed against him. She loved him, but pride had been more powerful than love, and now the end had come—the end of everything. She clutched the cushions of the lounge and sobbed. Again she thought of the church and the altar, and of her own words, spoken

so deliberately—the words which bound her forever to that old gray-haired man. She prayed that she might die. Vain fool that she was, no one could pity her, she could not even pity herself—for had she not accomplished the ruin of her happiness alone and unaided? Then, for a moment, she was tempted to cast honor and everything away. She longed to go to Jack Hardy and implore his forgiveness. She would defy the opinion of the world; she would give herself to him.

General Lloyd opened the door quietly. "It is getting late, Violet," he said.

His words startled her; she looked up suddenly. For a moment she wondered why he was there.

"Do you know you have been here nearly an hour?" he said.

"Have I?" she answered vacantly. "I thought you had just gone."

He came toward her, and sat down beside her; she felt him place his arm about her waist. She trembled and drew herself away.

His face hardened. "As you will," he said.

"Forgive me," she answered meekly. "I am very tired; my head aches. I feel as though I had a band of iron about my temples."

"Violet," he said, stroking her hair; "you do not love me."

"Why do you expect it?" she answered. "You know the bargain we made."

"I know that I love you," he cried, throwing his arms about her; "you cruel, fascinating creature. You are my wife; do you hear, my wife."

"Yes, I am your wife," she said coldly. "You may beat me if you like."

He glared at her angrily. "Take care," he said; "there is a limit to my patience."

"Why do you talk to me now?" she asked suddenly. "Can't you see that I am tired. If you were generous, you would leave me alone to-night. You would let me rest. Perhaps, to-morrow it will be different. Oh, let me rest to-night. Let me think."

She placed her hand on his shoulder as she said this, and looked into his face pleadingly.

"If you wish it," he said suddenly, leaving the seat beside her.

"Thank you," she answered.

He took a step toward the door, then he turned and looked at her; she did not notice him, she was staring vacantly before her.

"Shall I accompany you to your room?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I shall be well enough here, the first sleep here."

"You are ill, Violet."

"Yes, I am ill, my head burns with fever. Leave me, I beg you."

"I will leave you, but to-morrow, I shall demand an answer to one question."

"As well now as then," she said.

"Then why did you marry me?"

"Because I thought you were stronger than I; because you would compel me to obey you; because my heart is broken. That was what you wished, was it not—a wife whose heart had been broken."

"Yes," he answered coldly, "that was what I wished—a wife who will walk in the only path possible."

"And if I rebel; if I desert you?" she said looking at him curiously.

"I believe I should kill you."

She laughed. "As well that as any-

thing. I will warn you in time. I will let you know, so that you may have your revenge—"

"Violet," he cried, "if you were not so cruel and so cold, I should hate you, but you make me love you. I cannot help it."

"Have you forgotten your promise?" she asked. "You promised to leave me alone to-night."

"And I shall keep my word," he answered.

The door closed behind him. She knew she was alone. Quickly she ran toward the door leading to the hotel veranda, and threw it wide open.

"I wish to breathe," she cried. "When he is here, he robs me of the air."

She stood there gazing at the waters of Hampton Roads. A fleet of warships lay at anchor—huge iron monsters looming in the moonlight. A ship's bell clanged forth the hour of eleven—then a bugle from the fortress beyond sounded clear on the night air. Her heart beat faster. The water and the moonlight, and that army bugle sounding the familiar notes of "taps:" it made her think of distant Sheridan, and that mo-

ment by the lake, when she had forsworn love and happiness.

She was startled by a step upon the veranda. Looking up, she saw a man approaching quickly. He was wrapped in the folds of a military cloak. She took a step backward into her room. As she did so the moonlight fell on the man's face.

"Jack!" she exclaimed.

He started back. "Violet! Oh, I beg pardon, Mrs. Lloyd—"

She put out her hand. "Do n't Jack," she said. "Do n't be cruel to me. I could not stand it. I have suffered so much already."

"I thought you only made others suffer," he said coldly. "I wanted to forget you. Why have you come into my life again?" His lips were pressed together; he was breathing quickly.

She took a step toward him, and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"I knew you would come. Something told me you would come."

He turned away. "I am here on duty, as aide to General Wright," he said with an effort. "He is inspecting the coast defenses.

I did not follow you. Thank heaven, I am not so weak as that."

She took both his hands in hers. "Forgive me, Jack—oh, forgive me," she said pleadingly.

"Forgive you," he answered with a laugh. "It is easy to forgive. You have broken my heart—that is all. Yes, I forgive you."

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "if you only knew how I have suffered."

"Suffered," he replied. "You do not know what it is to suffer—not until you have loved as I have loved."

"Do n't, Jack. You are killing me." She closed her eyes; she dared not meet his glance.

For a moment he stood there thinking. It seemed so terrible to be there with her, to feel the pressure of her hands, and to know it was for the last time.

"Ah, Violet!" he cried impulsively. "Why did you let me know for one blessed moment that you loved me, and then leave me so cruelly. You did love me that night at Sheridan. I saw it in your eyes. Why did you leave me? There must have been a reason."

She bowed her head in shame.

"There is a reason," she said. "In a moment of anger I promised to marry General Lloyd, in order that I might be revenged for the neglect of a man who fascinated me for a few short weeks. I was too proud to break my word, even though it broke your heart and mine."

She spoke each word slowly and deliberately. It seemed a relief to speak the truth.

He looked at her reproachfully.

"And you call that a reason," he said.

"Forgive me, Jack. It is I who must suffer now."

"I have forgiven you," he answered, then he turned away abruptly—the pain was more than he could bear.

"Do n't, Jack. Do n't leave me—not like that."

He was afraid to answer—afraid, lest in speaking, he might prove his weakness. With an effort of despair, he took a step away from her.

"Come back, Jack; come back," she cried, seizing his arm.

"What would be the use," he asked. "I have no right to stay."

"You shall not leave me. I love you, Jack. Can't you see that I love you?" She looked into his face. There was no mistaking the love in those eyes.

"Don't tempt me," he said hoarsely, turning away.

"Ah, Jack. You do not love me. It is I who suffer now."

"Love you, Violet. I would die for you."

One moment, and she was in his arms. The tremor of her lips told him of the love he had awakened.

Her soft fragrant hair touched his face. Oh, the ecstacy of that moment. He had waited for it so long.

"Violet," he said; "I have never lived till now."

She looked up into his face.

"I am yours, Jack. Do with me as you will."

She was his now. No one should tear her from him. What did he care for the opinion of the world. She belonged to him; no power could make him give her up.

"Violet," he whispered; "you are not

his wife, not yet. Will you go with me—now—before it is too late?"

She trembled, then slowly she turned toward him, and raised her lips to his.

"Your hus—General Lloyd, I mean. Where is he?" he asked.

She turned her face away.

"He is in his room; he promised I should be alone to-night;" she shuddered at the sound of her words. "Oh, Jack, it is all so terrible," she said, burying her face on his shoulder.

"Violet," he whispered. "I want you to know what you are doing now, before it is too late."

"I know, Jack," she said. "I must go. I could not live without you."

Then she left him suddenly.

"Wait," she whispered. "I will be back. I cannot go as I am."

He stood there, waiting for her to return. It had all happened so suddenly, that he could not realise the love he had awakened. It seemed like a dream. But, Violet's eyes had burned into his soul as they had that night at Sheridan; her kisses were upon his lips. Yes, the love for which

he had waited so long had come at last. She had given herself to him, for better or for worse. He shuddered at the thought of those words. Ah, how distant it seemed; that church with the altar and the flowers, and Violet, the bride, meeting the hopeless glance of his eyes suddenly, and turning from him. Now she was his, but the thought seemed less pleasing. He could not forget the altar and the flowers, nor the vows he had heard, binding her to another. He drew his cloak about him more tightly. It was chilly there, in the night, and the thought of the future frightened him.

Violet stood in the doorway. "Jack," she whispered. "I am ready."

He went to her quickly; she trembled at his approach; her eyes looked up into his face pleadingly. He kissed her—the lips were cold.

"Are you sure, Jack, that it is for the best?" she asked.

He took both her hands in his. "Are you afraid, dearest?" he said, looking into her eyes.

"I love you," she answered, "with my

whole soul I love you, but would you be happy with me now. You understand, dear —the world—can we defy it?"

"No, Violet," he cried impulsively, "a thousand times no. I see it now as you see it—each hour, each moment that we lived we would regret it."

"Ah, dearest," she said. "I knew you were brave and generous and would understand. While I was in there alone—it all seemed so terrible—the thought that they would turn from us—because—because we had sinned."

His arms closed about her tenderly. A new light was in her eyes, the fire and the passion were gone—the fire which had burned through his soul.

"Yes," he said. "Your duty is to him. I am going now. I dare not stay. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, remember that I love you. I belong to you, Violet, now and forever."

He kissed her, knowing it was for the last time; but that kiss made him braver—he could look into her eyes now, and feel that the happiness of that moment was to endure always.

"I love you, Jack," she said, tenderly. "I shall love you always. Good-bye, dearest, good-bye."

In a moment he had gone. She stood there alone, gazing into the night, listening to the last echo of his step.

"Ah, how bitter the lesson," she sighed. "The lesson of pride."

Then she turned away, thankful for that one moment of happiness.

She started back suddenly, trembling and frightened. General Lloyd stood in the doorway.

"Do not be frightened," he said; "you have nothing to fear."

She saw the look in his face. It was different from any she had seen before.

"You were there," she said. "You heard?"

"Yes, Violet," he answered. "The window of my room was open. I heard all—"

"And you did not come—you did not—"

"Kill you," he laughed. "Yes, I almost did. See, I was ready," he said, raising the pistol he held in his hand.

She shuddered.

"There is nothing to fear, Violet. I have learned much to-night. I know now why you can never love me. I have learned what love is—"

"And you can forgive?" she asked.

"Forgive," he said. "I thank both of you, for you have taught me a lesson. I never knew before what it was to be generous, and brave. I have lived for selfishness alone. I have made others suffer to gratify me. I have scoffed at virtue and love, and all that was good; but you, Violet, have taught me to-night, that there is more in life than mere pleasure."

"Ah, but how near I came to forgetting it," she said.

"And how much cause you had to forget it. In my heart I could not have blamed you. I had no right to expect your love."

He came toward her. Taking her hand, he said gently:

"Violet, dear, I will not even ask you to make the pretense of loving me. Let us go through life—as we do this night—each apart. Let us be friends, that is all. Per-

haps together we can do some good in the world, and in a measure undo the terrible mistake you have made."

She looked into his eyes tenderly. She could not find the words to thank him.

"MRS. CORTLAND WAS ALONE."

XXII

"I LAUGH TO SEE YOUR LADYSHIP SO FOND."
Henry VI, III. 1.

The band ceased playing. Mrs. Cortland stifled a yawn. She was very much bored. It was an "off season" at Newport; except on Sunday, men were a rare commodity, and on Sunday they all played golf. The coterie of diplomats, usually so ubiquitous there, was scattered along the coast, mostly at New London.

Mrs. Cortland glanced about the grounds of the Casino; there was no one there except some women, quite as bored as herself, and a sprinkling of old men and college boys.

The situation was growing desperate.

She wished she had gone to Europe, that summer, as she had intended; now Bar Harbor seemed the only alternative.

Again she stifled a yawn.

She heard a step behind her. It was the step of a man. She turned her head

slightly. "Why!" she exclaimed, "where on earth did you come from?"

Komlossy quickened his pace, and came toward her.

"I came from Japan to see you," he said.

"I fear Japan has not improved your veracity. Sit down, and tell me the truth. What are you doing here?"

"You may not believe me," Komlossy said, as he took the seat beside her; "but I repeat again that I came to see you."

"Not all the way from Japan. That is too large an order for even my credulity."

"Well, to be very truthful, from New York. I arrived there yesterday. Three weeks at sea, a week in the train. I could not sail until Saturday. I was terribly bored. I thought of you, and here I am."

"Now we are getting at the truth, so I am merely an after-thought."

Komlossy looked at her and laughed. "You are the only woman who is a thought of any kind; you ought to be very much complimented."

"At being considered an antidote for boredom."

"No, at being remembered fondly for two whole years. You forget I have been in Japan.

"Ah, I begin to see it now," said Mrs. Cortland, dryly. "I suppose that is a compliment, judging by all one hears about the charms of the—the Geisha—is that what you call it?"

"My dear madame, I am serious so seldom that it is uncharitable not to encourage me in my admiration of your charming self, When a man of my age fosters a mad passion for two whole years, in such a distant corner of the earth as Japan, he deserves to be encouraged."

Mrs. Cortland looked at him quizzically. Then she laughed. "And you expect me to believe that?" she said.

"Implicitly."

"Really, Komlossy, you should not trifle so with my young affections. You are old enough to know better."

Komlossy smiled. "I am a serious man. I am ambassador now—ambassadors are always serious."

"Ah, yes. I heard of your promotion. Paris. How unfortunate. You will never

live to enjoy your luck. There are too many good cooks there. You will die of indigestion within a month."

He scowled. "I regret having come to Newport," he said.

"In other words you could not have been more bored in New York."

"Exactly, but I will give you one more chance to redeem yourself. Tell me all the gossip."

"That is uncomplimentary, only old women gossip."

"Well, tell me the news then. You remember I have been out of the world."

"News," she said, "that is different. I suppose I must do something to keep you here—men are at a premium in Newport. Let me see, what would interest you—ah, I have it. General Lloyd's death. Have you heard about it?"

"Really!" he exclaimed. "That is news. No, I had not heard."

"Yes, he died last week."

"How seldom a man dies at the right time. It must be a great relief to his wife."

"I am not quite sure about that," said Mrs. Cortland, thoughtfully. "You see,

Violet turned out very differently from what we all expected."

"She spent his money, did n't she?"

"Yes, but not in the way we expected. They lived quietly in the country. The General gave up politics, Violet gave up society, and they both went in for philanthropy—waifs' missions, hospitals, and all that sort of thing. I actually believe they were fond of each other, or of the hospitals. I could never make out which."

"How banale," said the Hungarian in disgust.

"You never could appreciate anything but a good dinner, Komlossy."

"Pardon me; you forget *yourself*," he said, suavely.

"Ah, then you actually raise me to the level of a cook. I am very grateful."

"Why will you continue to disbelieve in me. I came all the way to Newport to see you."

"From New York, not Japan," she interrupted.

"I had to reach New York first, because my ticket read that way."

"Well?"

THE VICE OF FOOLS

by

H. C. CHATFIELD-TAYLOR